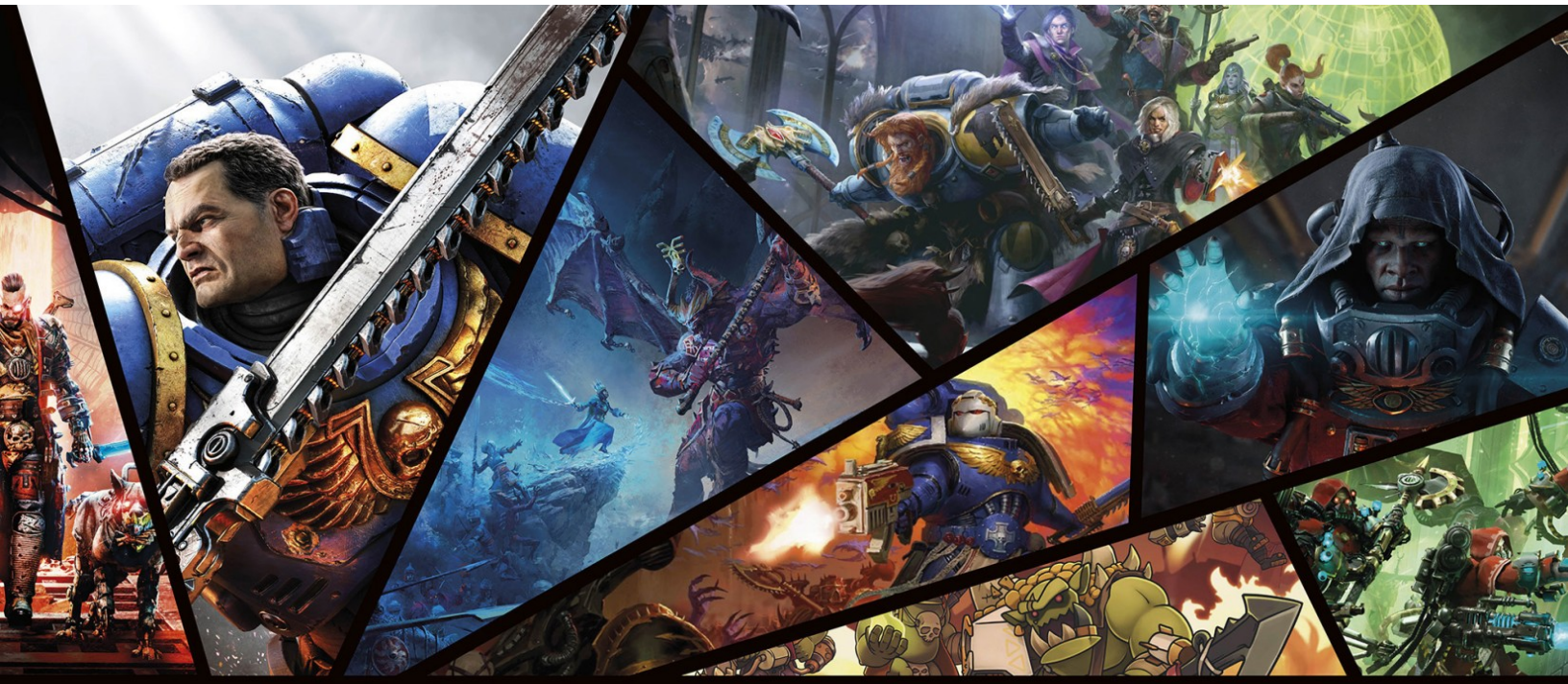

WARHAMMER™

THE ART OF WARHAMMER VIDEO GAMES

Written by
Andy Hall

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Marneus Calgar holding his ground in *Warhammer 40,000: Tacticus*

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BLOOD BOWL

Blood Bowl, Blood Bowl II, and Blood Bowl III

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

From humble beginnings, *Warhammer* has grown to define the genre of fantasy tabletop wargaming. Where before fantasy miniatures populated the dungeons of early '80s role-playing games (RPGs), the legions of armed warriors and fearsome monsters now went to war in the nascent world of *Warhammer*.

Now collectors and players were no longer buying the odd goblin and a few Orc figures, but mustering whole regiments of creatures into large fighting forces. As new editions and supplements were written and illustrated by the stable of talented creators at Games Workshop, the setting in which these armies battled began to evolve, transitioning from a "traditional" fantasy world into something wholly *Warhammer*.

Meanwhile, something was in the works behind the scenes. It finally released in 1987, a tome called *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader*, detailing a miniature skirmish battle system set in the grim darkness of the far future. This too was *Warhammer*, but a different kind. It still had Orks (although now spelt with a K at the end) and even "Space Elves" – as the Aeldari were first known. Yet, this game was science-fiction – well, actually science-fantasy – set in a war-torn galaxy.

The aesthetic for 40K (as *Warhammer 40,000* would become colloquially known) was marked by a unique art style and feel that defined the "grim dark" genre, and the iconic miniatures designed by talented and dedicated sculptors and artists. Thus, *Warhammer* established itself on the tabletop as battles of miniature figures, where gamers used dice and tape measures to determine outcomes. I was one of those players; the weekends of my youth were spent moving my forces of Chaos Warriors, Skaven, and Space Marines against my best friends' armies, most notably, their arrogant High Elves and grudge-bearing Dwarfs.

Warhammer's home may have been the tabletop, but it was too big, too burgeoning, to stay there. However, what you and many readers of this book probably didn't realise is that the jump into the digital realm happened a lot sooner than most assume.

The very first *Warhammer* video game was based on a board game collaboration between Games Workshop and MB Games. *HeroQuest* was a dungeon-explorer that used Citadel Miniatures and was drenched in *Warhammer* lore, bringing it to many young, eager minds, including my own. The video game adaptation was released in 1991 for the Commodore Amiga, Atari ST, and even the Sinclair Spectrum.

Warhammer 40,000 followed with its first digital version just a year later in 1992. This was *Space Crusade* – a video game based on another successful MB and Games Workshop board game. Then, in 1993, Electronic Arts released *Space Hulk*, the video game version of the famous Games Workshop classic, that saw Space Marine Terminators patrol the confined corridors of derelict space vessels, stalked by alien Genestealers.

Warhammer 40,000 had truly arrived in the digital realm. From that point on, there has been a *Warhammer* video game released at minimum every two years – and in many cases annually. That's most of my teenage and adult life, well over 30 years if you're keeping count! I've been honoured to work on a few of these projects – from the last decade, I hasten to add – whether that was fleshing out the Skaven language, known as Queekish, in *Vermintide*, writing scripts for the *Blood Bowl* commentators, or being the lead writer and storyteller on *Total War: Warhammer* and more than a few other titles.

This is why I've been nominated to be your congenial guide as we explore the best of this rich catalogue. However, it is the artists and animators of these games who are the true creative stars of this chiefly visual medium (not forgetting music and audio also have a massive part to play but are more difficult to showcase on the page!). Miniatures are the source of all *Warhammer*; what the artists of video games must do is turn those static forms into believable characters and avatars. Giving Tyranid monsters or even Bretonnian Knights weight as they move, or ensuring a Space Marine's bulky power armour articulates in a way that doesn't clip or snag is where the challenge often lies.

As we shall see, it's a challenge these developers have embraced to bring the worlds of *Warhammer* to life in a way never thought possible when this brilliant, dark, and unique setting was first conceived.

A psyker from *Warhammer 40,000: Darktide*

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Key art from *Space Hulk: Deathwing*

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Warhammer 40,000: Shootas, Blood & Teef
Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine
Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II

While there had been a few digital forays into gaming previously, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* was *Warhammer 40,000*'s first massive hit. Well over seven million copies of the series have been sold to date, which all started with this 2004 launch. *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* is a real-time strategy game with the player controlling multiple squads on a large map, building up resources, and then fighting enemy entities once they have been located.

The first game was so successful that it was still supported four years later with the release of the *Soulstorm* expansion, which brought in the Sisters of Battle and Dark Eldar. Before that, *Winter Assault* saw the introduction of the Imperial Guard – as they were known at the time. *Dark Crusade*, released in 2006, introduced the T'au and the Necrons, both of which were relatively new xenos to the setting, and so this was their first appearance in video game form.

Despite the variety of factions to play, the stars of *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* continued to be the Space Marines. The Blood Ravens were introduced with the game and remained the core of the series from *Dawn of War I* to *III*. Even for Space Marines, the Blood Ravens are a secretive Chapter with an unknown founding number that some speculate links back to the Horus Heresy itself. The Chapter is unconventional in that it recruits an abnormal number of librarians; whether this is tied to their mysterious genetic heritage remains unknown. As a Chapter, they fight for the Emperor and will slay xenos and heretics with abandon, and yet they seem to prioritise the acquisition of ancient lore and seeking out lost relics above all else. This has seen the Blood Ravens come under Inquisitorial scrutiny far more than your average codex-compliant Chapter, which makes them compelling protagonists for the *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* series.

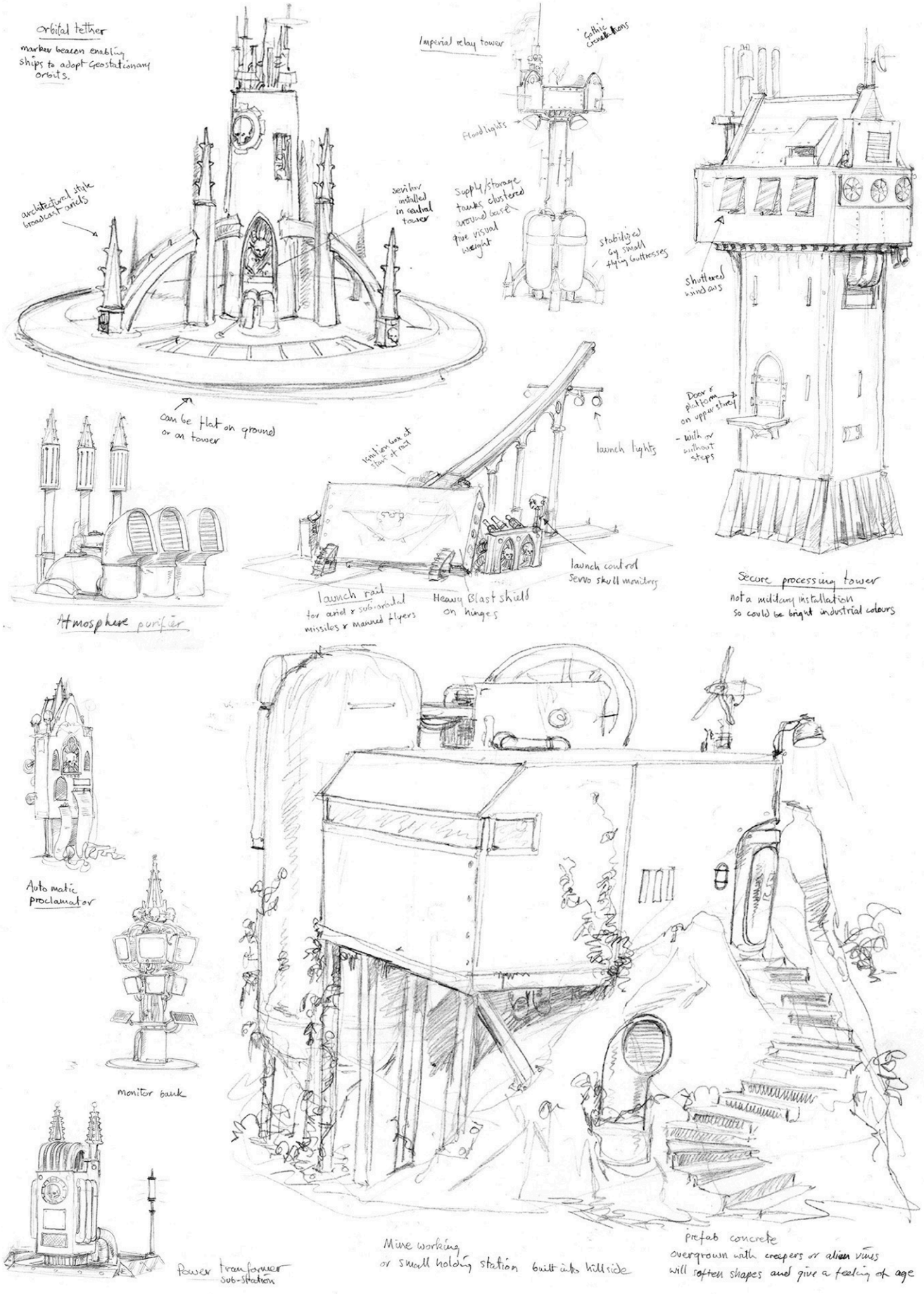
Above the setting, what really appealed in the video game were the matched animations. This was when two enemy entities met and synced up for a spectacular kill animation. Such sync-kills are expensive to develop over a standard attacking animation loop, but *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* was replete with them. Such quality polish was appreciated by the strategy players, and it has been a key series feature ever since. Relic Entertainment, the studio behind *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*, took this reputation for awesome and gory kills on to *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine*, where it became a key and beloved feature in that game series as well.

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War key art

EXPANSIONS

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War was blessed with several expansions over an impressive four-year window. All were highly rated by critics and the fandom, with each one introducing new factions and storylines, pitting the Blood Ravens against lethal xenos and the vengeance of the Ruinous Powers. The expansions were *Winter Assault* in 2005, *Dark Crusade* in 2006, and *Soulstorm* in 2008.

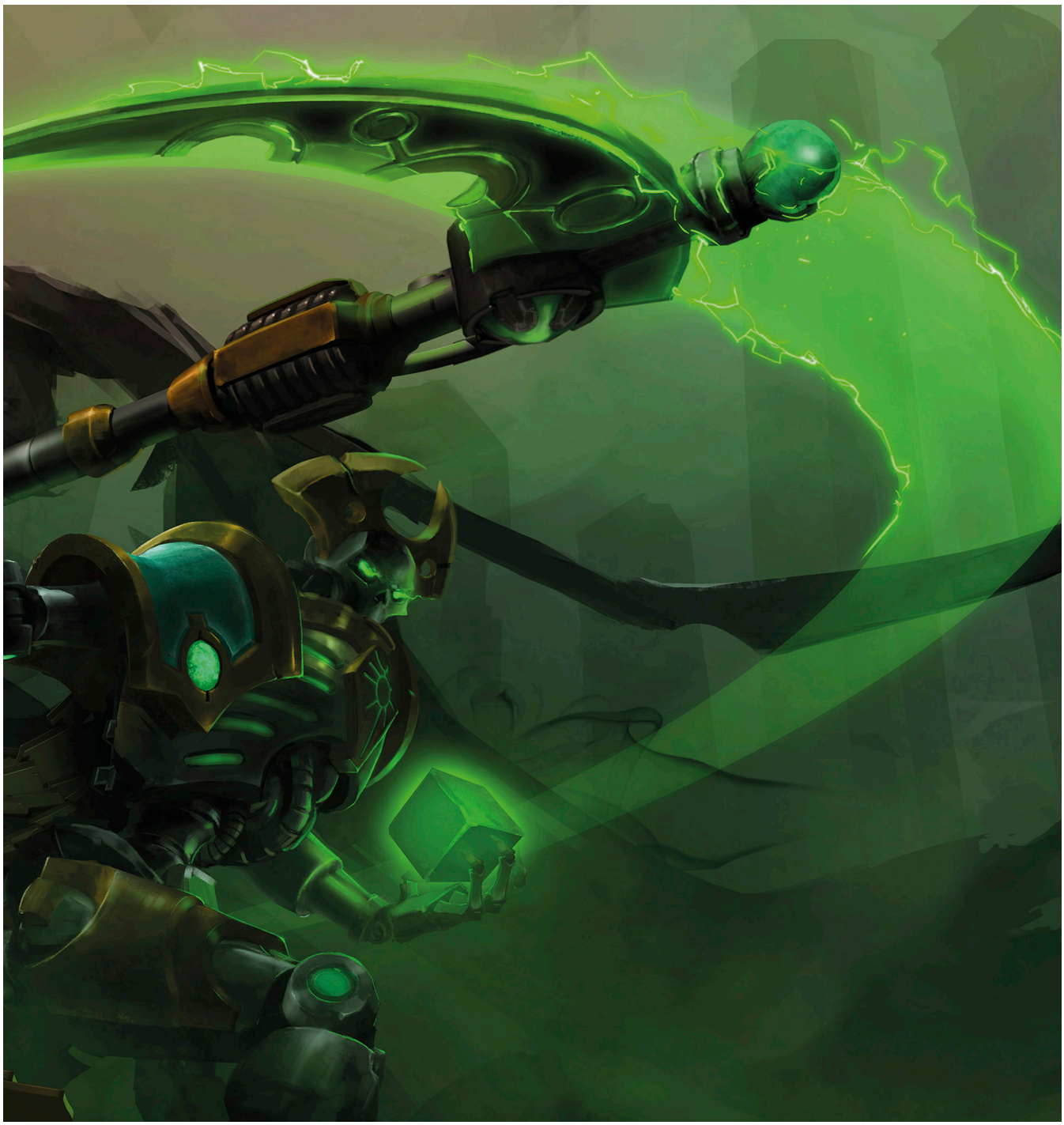
T’au Commander concept art


Orbital tether
marker beacon enabling ships to adopt Geostationary orbits.
architectural style broadcast aerials
can be flat on ground or on tower
Atmosphere purifier
Imperial relay tower
Gothic crenellations
Floodlights
Supply/storage tanks clustered around base give visual weight
stabilised by small flying buttresses
service installed in central tower
launch lights
launch control servo skull monitors
launch rail for aerial x sub-orbital missiles x manned flyers
Heavy blast shield on hinges
shuttered windows
Door x platform on upper storey
- with or without steps
Secure processing tower
not a military installation so could be bright industrial colours
Automatic proclamator
monitor bank
Power transformer sub-station
Mine working or small holding station built into hillside
prefab concrete overgrown with creepers or alien vines will soften shapes and give a feeling of age

Early environment sketches

"The Planet Cronus, beset on all sides by tides of war. This once quiet colony became a savage battlefield. Seven armies clashed on this one world each refusing to back down. Each convinced it was in the right. A dark crusade had begun. It could only end with the total victory of one of these factions and the total defeat of all others."

– REMEMBRANCER THETA-SCION OF THE INQUISITION



Key art from the *Dark Crusade* expansion

With the first game's success, a sequel to *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* was inevitable. By then, the game's name was so closely linked to the setting that it had even crossed back into the source tabletop game's core rulebook with a mission called "Dawn of War." This is ironic, as the game's title took a long gestation, with many other iterations being suggested by Games Workshop and the developer, Relic. The series was unnamed until very close to its actual release and everyone finally settled on *Dawn of War*.

Like its forebear, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II* was a real-time strategy game, although there was now a more tactical and narrative edge to the core loop. Relic Entertainment was once again the developer, and with their recent hit, *Company of Heroes*, still proving popular, they wanted to apply some of their learnings from that project to *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II*. Their leading games designer at the time explained to the website GameSpot, "it takes everything that was great about the original and combines it with the best that *Company of Heroes* had to offer."

What this meant for the missions were smaller forces and more intense action. Finding cover and out-flanking your foes was rewarded, and maps were designed to be navigated, rather than simply for base-camping. In fact, such was the focus that base building was removed entirely. This radical departure from the real-time strategy genre presented a whole new tactical challenge for *Dawn of War* players, and in a setting where there is only war, getting straight to the battles and spending less time running the logistics of a Space Marine base makes sense. This increased the storytelling potential of the game, and its cinematics were some of the best seen yet to bring the world of *Warhammer 40,000* to life.

Blood Ravens of the 1st Company prepare to enter a portal on the surface of Aurelia

HEAD COUNT

The head and face can convey so much character. While pixel counts and graphical fidelity might not always allow this level of detail for the final in-game assets, concept artists can get across much of a character in head shots, in the hope that this will follow through in the later assets. There are also practical reasons for doing multiple head shots: to show a variety of character potentials on one body asset, or even to stress areas where faces may be restricted, such as for the Librarian shown above.

Note the eyes of the Aeldari on the images later in this section. The artist uses the brow to convey threat and distrust where much of the rest of the face remains covered.

A Blood Raven's Assault Marine

Detail of a Space Marine lightning claw

Space Marine Venerable Dreadnought

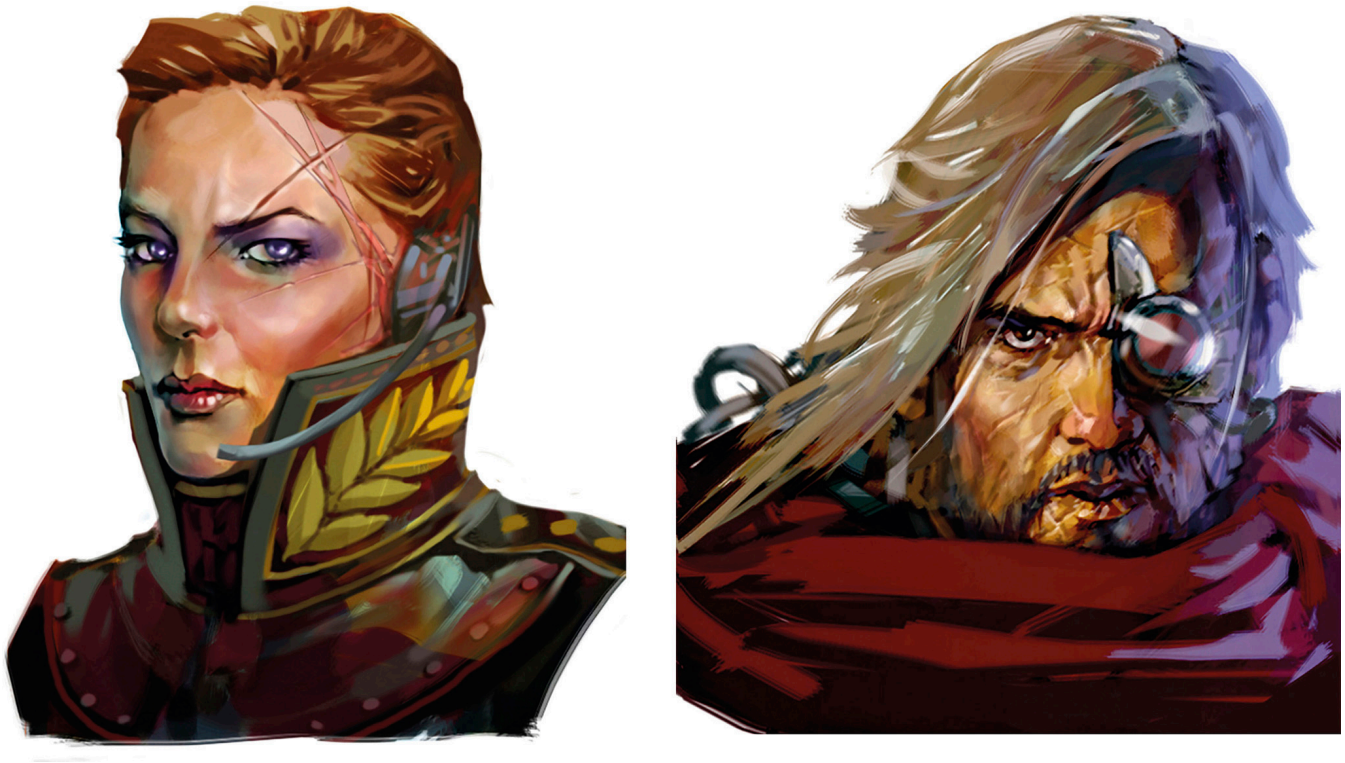
An imposing *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II* key art

Librarian concept art

CAST AWAY

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II is a story-rich game with a broad cast of characters: adjuncts of traitorous governors, Blood Ravens sergeants who flout Chapter doctrine, Chaos Lords, and the unnamed commander, who is the player's avatar within the game.

It's always an interesting creative choice in video games, when the protagonist is in fact the player. Do you let them self-insert into the game or have them simply play as a named or famous character? Both directions are viable and will often depend on the genre and format. There are even a few game titles that try and have it both ways, with the game's hero held back from any gregarious traits and having a faceless helmet, so the player can still "imprint" on them. *Warhammer* games have used both techniques successfully. The *Dawn of War* series has tried both character options; in the third game, it is not an unnamed commander, but Gabriel Angelos who is the star.



Concept art of Administrator Elena Derosa and Scout Sergeant Cyrus

The force commander

Sergeant Avitus artwork

Annotated concept art of Araghast the Pillager

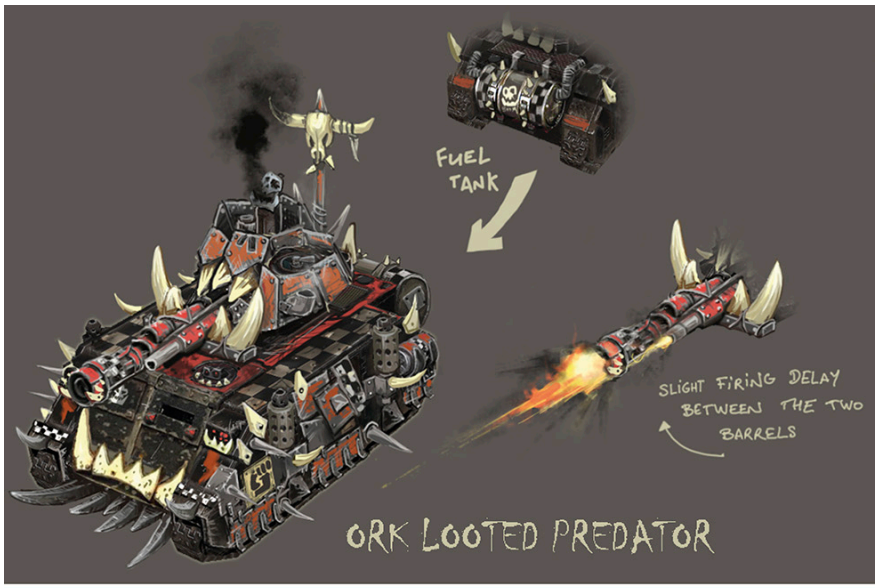
Araghast concept art

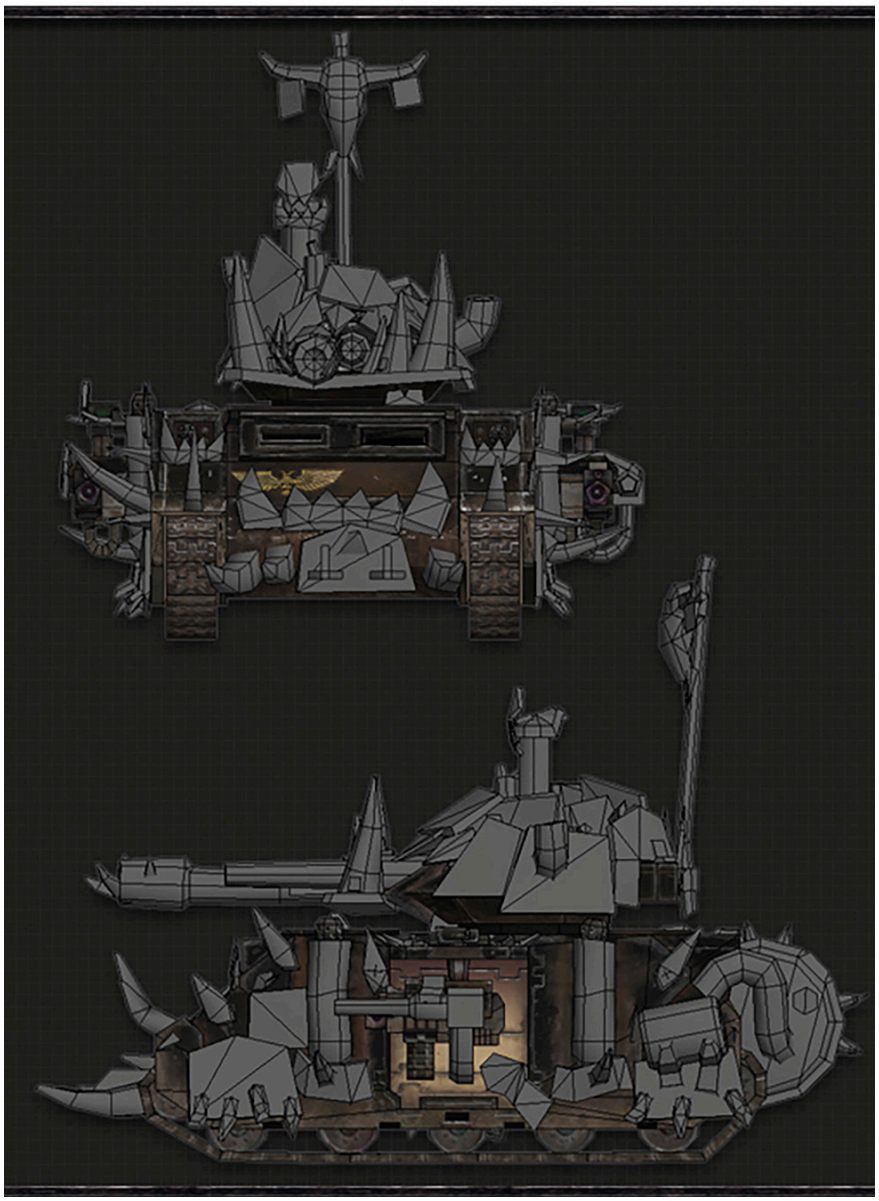
Chaos follower illustration

Portraits of Aeldari

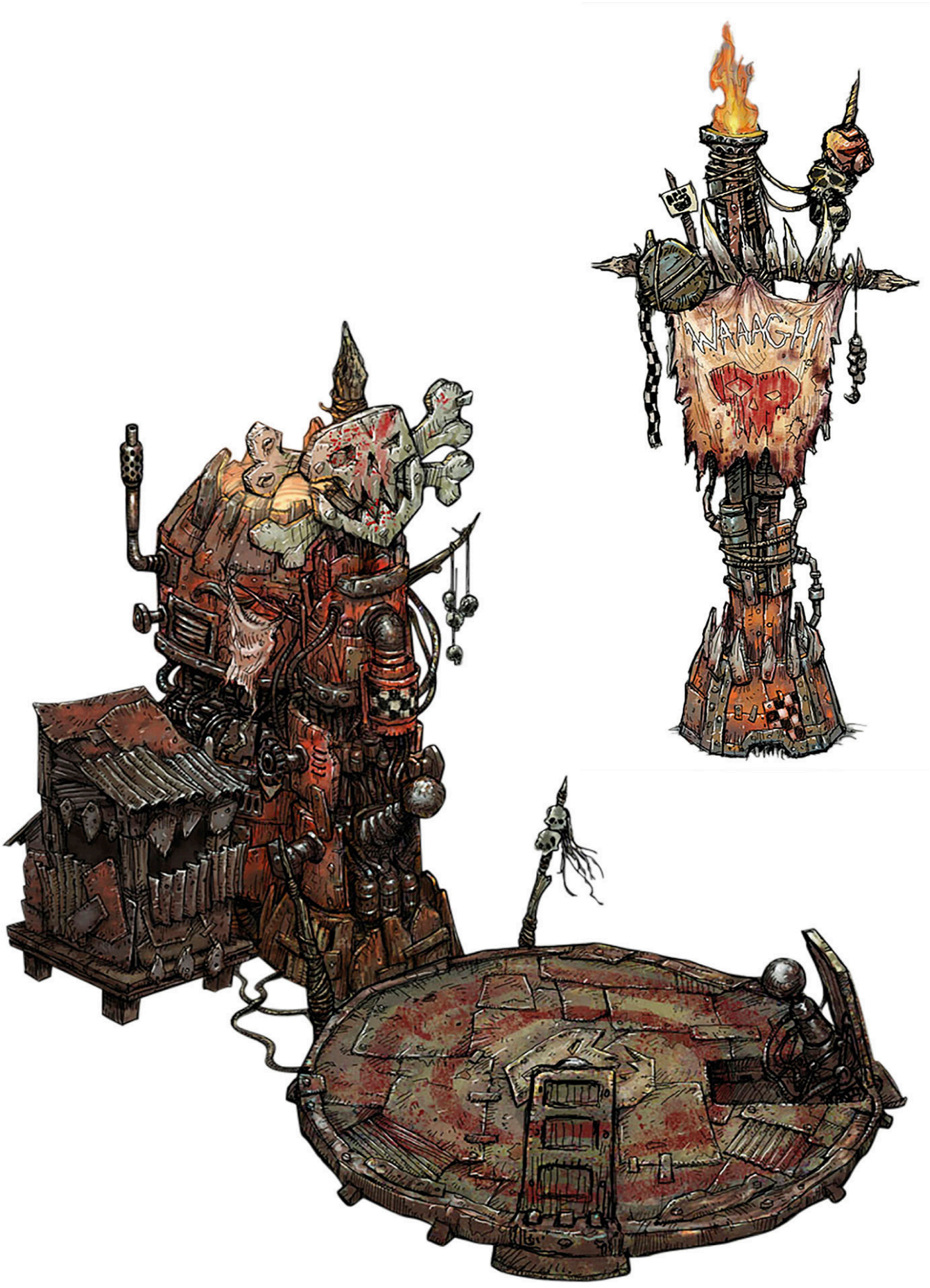
THE IMPERIUM'S HATED FOES

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II's roster of enemies included the Orks, Eldar (now known as Aeldari), and the Tyranids. The first expansion, *Chaos Rising*, brought Chaos Space Marines from the Word Bearers and Black Legion. Yet, there was a chance the player could potentially join with the Heretic Astartes, as *Chaos Rising* included a corruption system – should the player be tempted to play through the corruption missions, there was a chance that the enemies of Chaos would become allies instead.


FUEL TANK
SLIGHT FIRING DELAY BETWEEN THE TWO BARRELS
ORK LOOTED PREDATOR



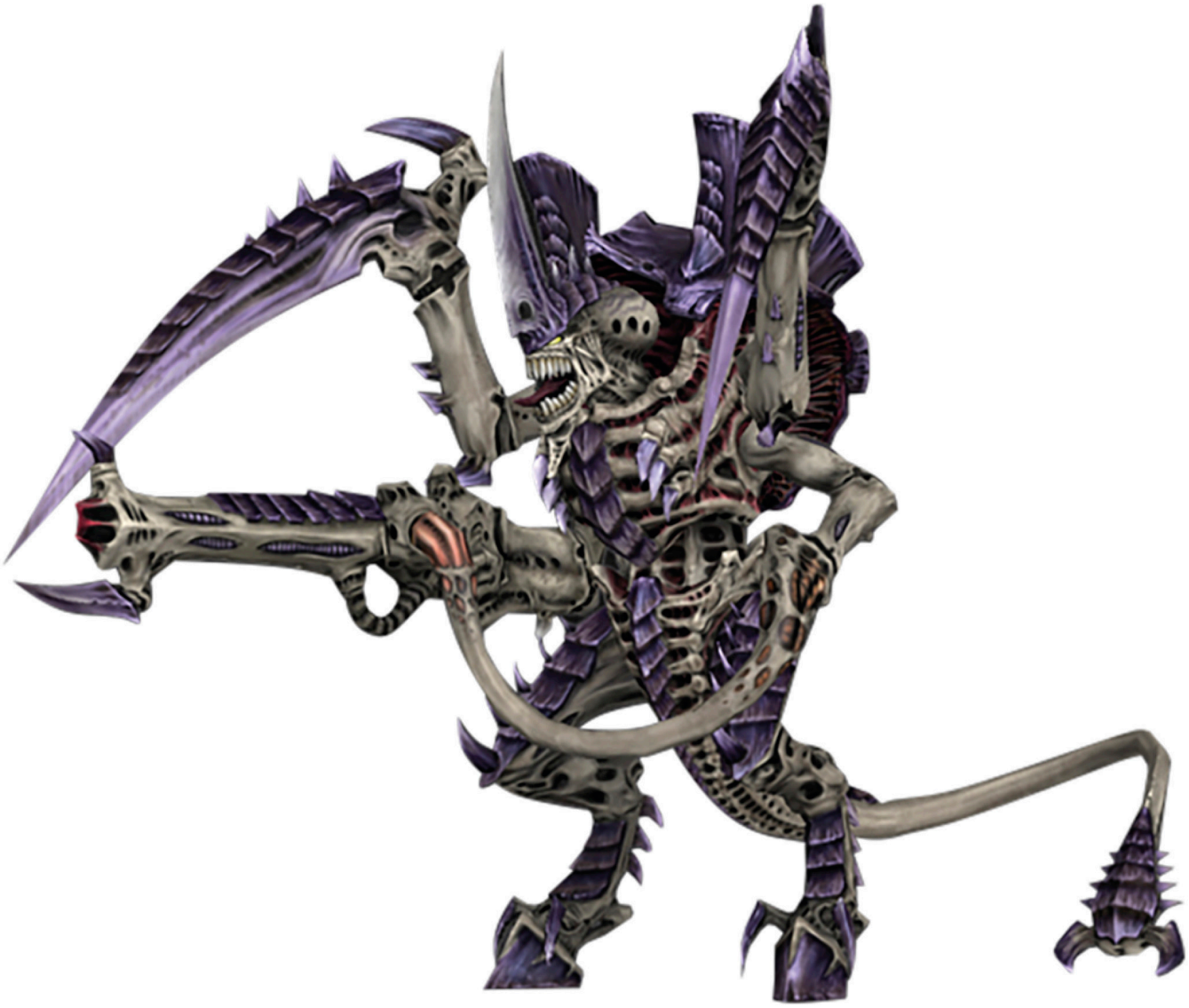
Ork Looted Predator annotated design and exterior illustration


WAAAGH!

Ork objectives

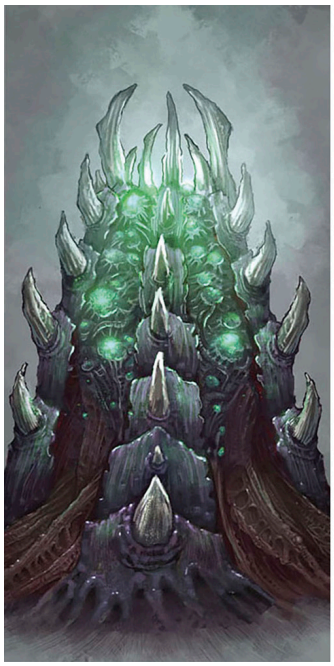
HIVE FLEET

The Tyranids' first appearance in the *Dawn of War* series came in this sequel. The Tyranids brought swarm-like gameplay to fight against and an array of terrifying bioweaponry and bioforms. From the *Chaos Rising* expansion, the Hive Tyrant was playable, allowing you to plan your own hive invasion to scour planets of their biomass.



Tyranid Hive Tyrant

Tyranid node objective



Images of the hive world terrain

The third installment in the *Dawn of War* series was released in 2017. The game was a combination of the previous titles, taking the tactical and narrative elements from the second, but also including beloved elements from the first game, like the traditional base building of a real-time strategy title.

The third game offered a veritable feast of game modes, including a comprehensive multiplayer mode. As *Dawn of War I* and *II* were quite different by design, the central pillar of the third game in the series was to unite the fandoms of both. Upon release, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III* scored well with critics who liked the blend and the plethora of multiplayer aspects.

The ongoing narrative of the Blood Ravens was to continue with this title, as the Chapter Master, Gabriel Angelos, tackles the Ork Warboss Gorgutz from the first game and the power-hungry Eldar who are obsessed with finding the divine relic, the Spear of Khaine. This happens over a sprawling seventeen-mission campaign.

What was a departure from the previous games was the visual style. As you'll see over the coming pages, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III* units have a certain gloss and sheen, compared to the older games. That is to be expected, as there is a 13 year difference between the first and third game, and graphics improve and styles move on. Multiplayer online battle arenas were popular around the time of the third game's release, and that visual style felt like a good match for *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III*.

The design of the game also evolved due to gameplay considerations. The intention behind this game direction was to increase the responsiveness of the units – to not let the windup animations slow down the player's aims. Once players had clicked on a unit, it needed to be moving quickly to make the gameplay snappier. While a departure from previous games, the change to this new, cleaner style of graphics was developed with these mechanics in mind.

Gabriel Angelos of the Blood Ravens faces off against the Ork Warboss Gorgutz and Macha, Eldar Farseer

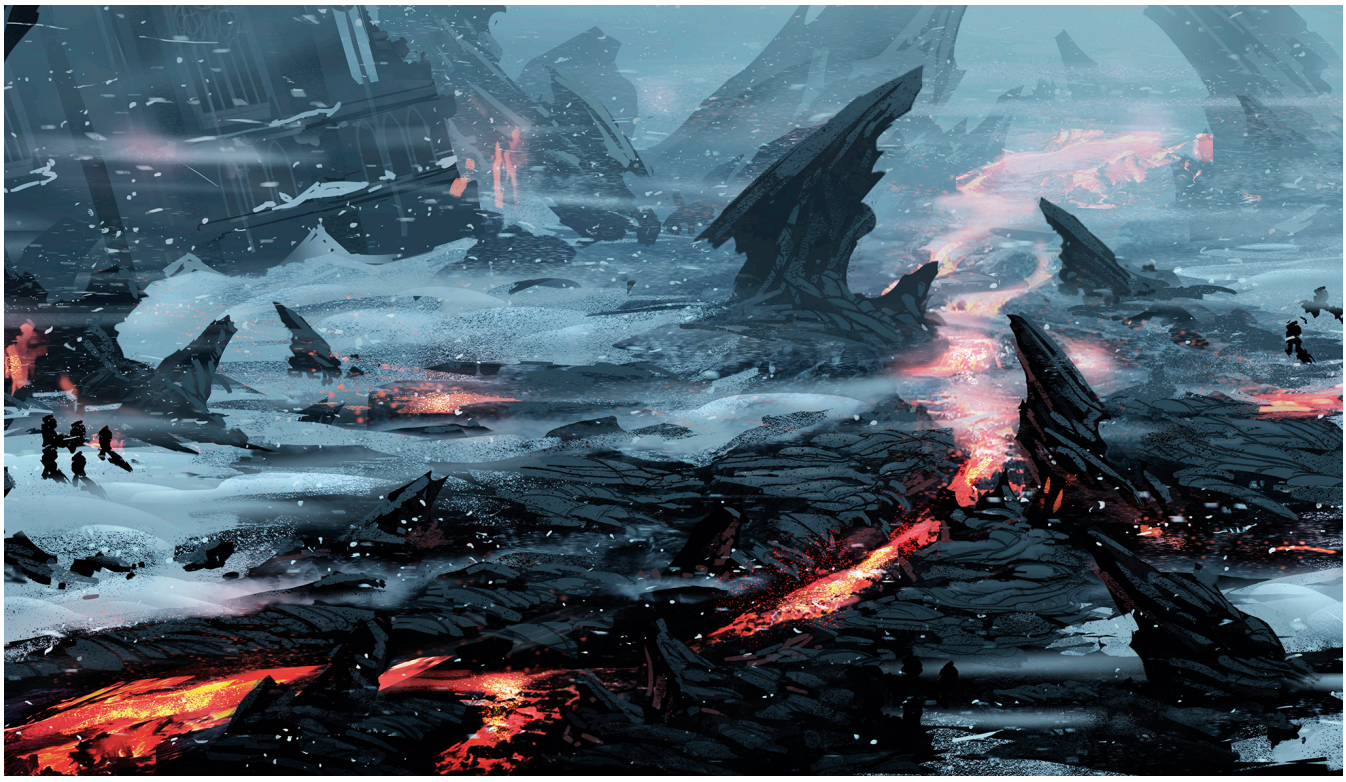
THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III takes place over a myriad of beautiful and haunting environments on the planet of Acheron. Contrasts always work well in environmental storytelling: lava amongst the ice, alien monoliths against the cathedrals, alien architecture in the desert, a Wraithknight against the shimmer of an ethereal mist.

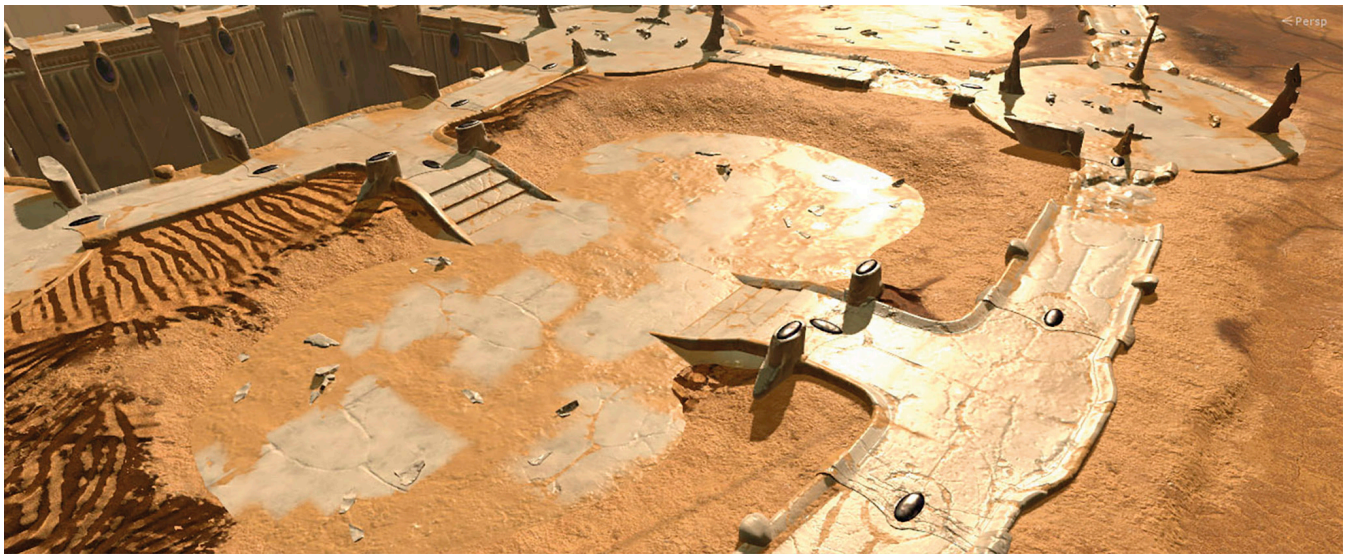
These bright environments are one of the elements that made *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III* such an attractive game. The images displayed here show a mixture of concepts and early game renders. Lighting always plays an important part in environment stage-setting and is often one of the last things to be set, usually in the beta phase of the game. For example, in the top right image on this page, the primary light source in the desert landscape is a little over-exposed, blooming out in some areas; this would inevitably be toned down by the game's release as part of the development process.

Early concept drawing for the Blood Ravens stronghold

An Aeldari Wraithknight



The Firefields of Acheron



An abandoned Aeldari fastness

A volcano fortress

MIGHTY KNIGHTS

A massive – quite literally – addition to the series in *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III* were the Knights. These huge, ancient battlesuits from another era were introduced in the tabletop game *Adeptus Titanicus* but really came to prominence in the early 2010s with new plastic models made for *Warhammer 40,000*. Standing at around 40ft tall, Knights are a powerful addition to any Imperial or Chaos force.

Imperial Knight Paladin

Artwork of Macha, Farseer of the Eldar Craftworld of Biel-Tan

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III key art featuring Chapter Master Angelos in the foreground

"In this dark place, in this dark hour, we will stand against the enemies of the Emperor. And they will know that not even here on this desecrated infernal rock will we suffer the existence of the heretic. Not now. Not ever."

– CHAPTER MASTER GABRIEL ANGELOS

Skulls of the dead, an iconic key artwork from *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III*

SPACE HULK TACTICS

The original *Space Hulk* board game was released back in 1989, developed by an exceptional team of designers from Games Workshop's earlier years, some of whom were there at *Warhammer*'s inception. *Space Hulk* is a two-player asynchronous game, where one person takes the role of Terminator Space Marines and the other plays as the aliens that lurk within the confines of the titular Space Hulk – an amalgamation of derelict voidships drawn together by Warp currents.

Space Hulk was tense. This was due to the way the game's mechanics worked. Unlike the alien Genestealers, the Space Marine player was on a strict timer; they had to get all their Terminator figures moved and in position within three minutes. Meanwhile, the alien player advanced around the map using "blip" counters, representing contacts on the Space Marine's scanner or auspex. Through this gameplay, the map tiles cleverly represent both the actual and the scanner depiction of the mission area. Once the blips were in view of a Terminator miniature, they're revealed, and the true number of Genestealers are placed on the game tile. It's then a matter of speed as the Space Marines need to shoot the xenos, using a storm bolter and flamer, before the Genestealers close in and cut the battle-brothers down with claws that can slice through tactical dreadnought armour.

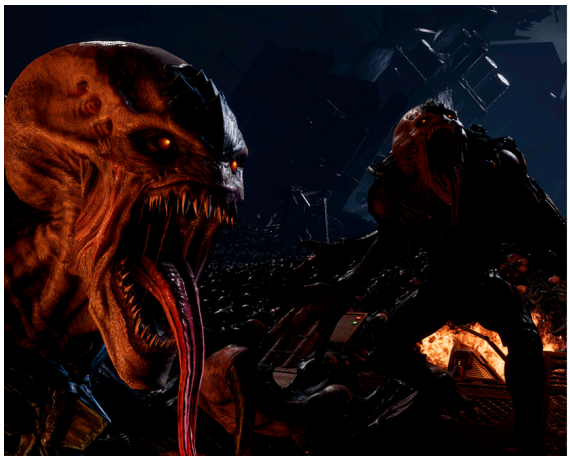
It's not a surprise that this pumping, tense action-dichotomy has made it into video game form several times over the last three decades. One of the very first-ever Games Workshop licences was awarded to Electronic Arts to make *Space Hulk* for the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga. It's a game I remember well from my youth: playing with my best friend Robert (who is still a close pal). We spent many a weekend playing *Warhammer* in the daytime; then, into the evening, we crowded around the Amiga, booted up *Space Hulk,* and worked through the missions, using the "freeze time" mechanic to plan out and manoeuvre our Terminators to recover C.A.T.s (Cyber-Altered Task units) or flame objective rooms.

Space Hulk:Tactics was one of the latter editions of this revered game, released relatively recently in 2018. Unlike some iterations of *Space Hulk*, this version is a relatively faithful version of the board game rules, eschewing the more action-heavy takes such as *Space Hulk: Deathwing* and leaning into the claustrophobic tension and tactics that made the physical game so beloved. It's also one of the few versions of *Space Hulk* video games that lets you play as the Genestealers.

Blood Angels Terminators fend off a Genestealer attack

INTERIOR DESIGN

Space Hulk games revel in the gothic splendour and claustrophobic horror of Imperium ship corridors. However, these are not the only environments players will fight in. For one of the first times players could step into xenos vessels, including the ramshackle health-and-safety nightmares that are Ork ships.

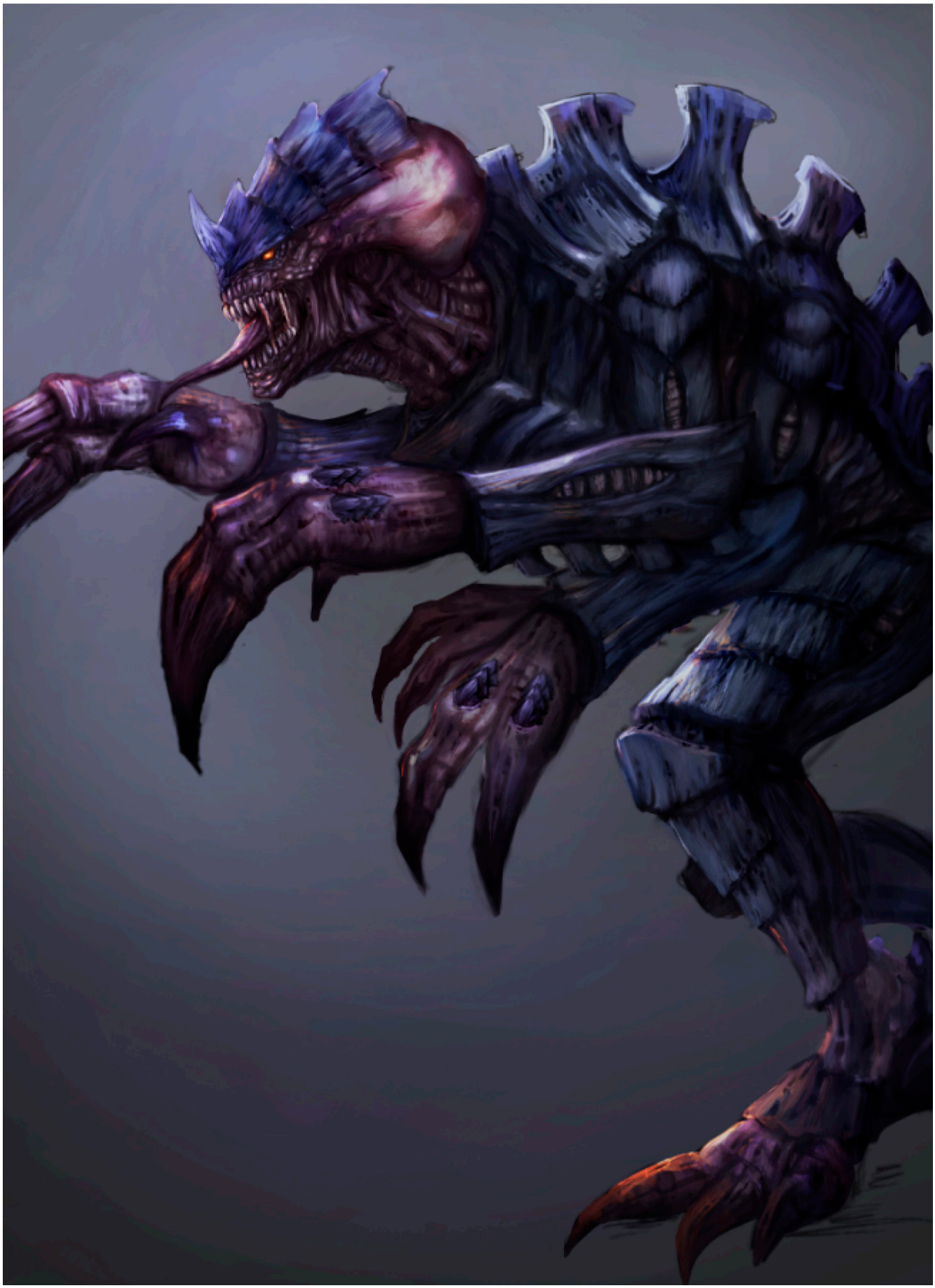


Genestealers roar in challenge, Blood Angels Terminator faces off against a Genestealer, and void debris approaches a planet

Early concept art of a Genestealer assault

Rough colour version of the Genestealer assault

Catacomb deck on a Space Hulk



Genestealer side view

Genestealer side view T-pose

Ork Kroozer interior

"My battle-brothers have a mission and an enemy to kill. By the Throne's Light, that is all the Emperor's Angels require!"

– CAPTAIN UBALDO OF THE BLOOD ANGELS

By the mid 2010s, Games Workshop's timeless board game, *Space Hulk*, had seen several digital adaptations. Most notably, in 1993 it was adapted into one of the first-ever *Warhammer 40,000* video games for the Commodore Amiga computer, followed by *Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels* for consoles later in the same decade.

While previous *Space Hulk* games featured a strategy aspect, mirroring the board game, *Space Hulk: Deathwing* focused more on the action aspect. The player is a Dark Angel Terminator Librarian of the Deathwing, the vaunted 1st Company, leading a squad of battle-brothers into the depths of an alien-infested Space Hulk. The game is a no-holds-barred first-person shooter (FPS), so the environments are key. Any game bearing the *Space Hulk* name has dark, claustrophobic corridors, but the gameplay was expanded to include more cavernous surroundings, vaulted naves, and cathedral-like buildings, mixed in with long oppressive passageways. These are *Warhammer 40,000* vessels, after all. That unique dark atmosphere was brought into this FPS environment in a way that, up until that point, hadn't been realised before.

The narrative for this title was one well known to players of *Space Hulk* games; the Genestealers were turning a conglomeration of ships that had collided and merged – like driftwood collecting on the same beach – into a xenos nest, where it would continue to drift on a Warp-current and eventually encounter a populated system. The Dark Angels are searching the Space Hulk for relics paramount to their Chapter.

The story and scripts were authored by multiple talented writers and novelists at Games Workshop, and their deep knowledge on the Dark Angels Chapter ensured the game was dripping in rich lore and compelling story. Some reviewers criticised this, commenting that it made the game difficult to grasp if you're not familiar with *Warhammer 40,000*. I tend to disagree. I think, in general, that players enjoy the immersion of being thrown into the deep end of a discernible setting and slowly becoming familiar with the tropes and nomenclature that give the world its depth. It's true players can be overwhelmed if bombarded – if they feel they are wading through an encyclopedia of names and labels. But if, as it is in *Space Hulk: Deathwing*, the information is drip-fed alongside clear motivations and goals for the characters they are playing, then they will be immersed and want more.

Grand Master Belial artwork

THE DEATHWING

The Dark Angels 1st Company is made up of the Chapter's veteran brothers, each one a battle-hardened warrior of numerous campaigns. However, initiation into the Deathwing is more than a mere recognition of the brother's veterancy; it is a commencement into the first layers of the hidden truths and secrets guarded by the Dark Angels' Inner Circle. The first truth a Deathwing member learns is of Luther's betrayal and the hunt for the Fallen Angels.

Deathwing Terminator Librarian and close-up of power fist and shield

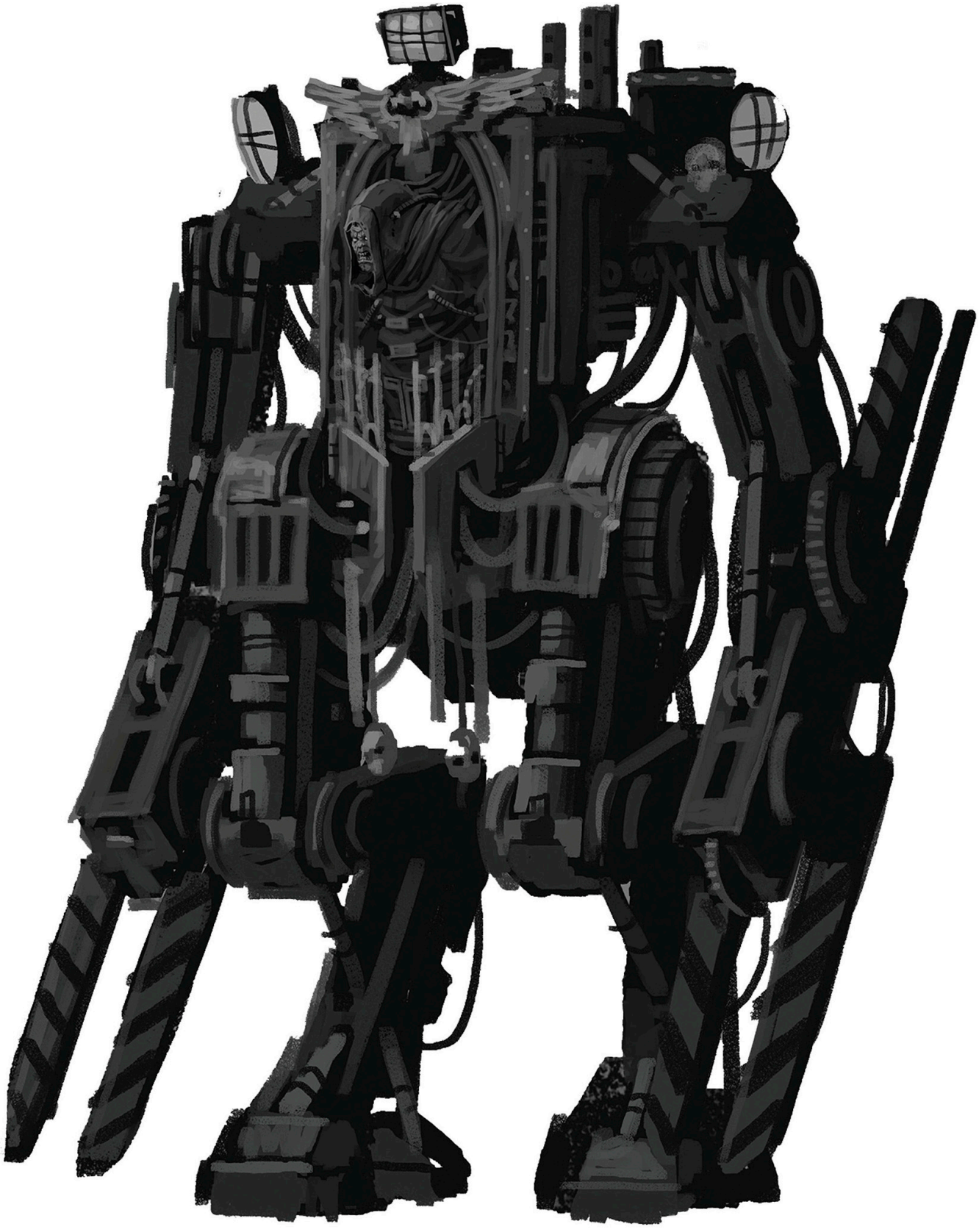
Deathwing Terminator Chaplain

Power mace

Thunder hammer

THE STAIN OF GLASS

One of the unique aspects of *Warhammer 40,000* is the marriage of distant-future science-fiction technology with medieval and renaissance imagery. Some of the most evocative items that portray this merging of the ancient and new are the stained glasses featuring the Imperium's warriors and god-machines. The medium is more commonly seen in churches depicting the saints of yore.



Cargo-servitor concept art

The birthplace of the Adeptus Mechanicus was the ancient Forge World of Mars. Mars was colonised very early in human history, long before the start of even the Dark Age of Technology, and developed a society different from Terra both culturally and in terms of technological advancement. The arid, rusty surface of Mars was terraformed, and under a man-made oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, the Martian colony flourished, though it remained politically independent from Terra. When the era of human interstellar colonisation began, both Terra and Mars served as the co-equal mother worlds of countless new human colonies across the galaxy.

During the Dark Age of Technology, the two empires of Terra and Mars co-existed under the aegis of the decentralised human interstellar government of that era, to the mutual benefit of both. At the height of its splendour during that era, and even later in the anarchic Age of Strife, Mars despatched hundreds of colony fleets into the void. Many perished in the terrible Warp Storms that engulfed the galaxy at that time before the birth of the Chaos God Slaanesh, but others survived or made their way forward at sublight speeds in realspace. Those who did founded new Forge Worlds in the name of the Machine God and built on them a likeness of the great manufactorums and temples of their distant homeworld. These Forge Worlds also forged new empires for the Mechanicus among the feudal Knight Worlds and added their unique combat walkers, the Knights, to the Mechanicus' own powerful arsenal.

The onset of the Age of Strife brought an end to the glory and peace of the ancient interstellar human domain. Across the galaxy, Mankind suddenly turned upon itself as a new breed of Warp-attuned psykers emerged and Warp Storms engulfed the galaxy, rendering interstellar travel and communication dangerous to the point of impossibility. Civil war engulfed thousands of human worlds, even the twin human homeworlds of Terra and Mars.

Many warring factions vied for power on Mars and waged a brutal civil conflict using arcane and unimaginably destructive weaponry, including psychic abilities. The carefully constructed atmosphere of Mars was burned away, and once more the rusty surface of the planet was exposed to the deadly radiations of the Sun. The terraformed Martian environment, which had formed with Terran life for centuries, was rendered a barren crimson desert again. The Martian [illegible] now fought in the same blood-hued wasteland that the first human colonists from Terra had found millennia before. Many of the Martian population retreated underground, as any who were not equipped with a [illegible] life support suit could [illegible] the [illegible] Planet's [illegible]

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A moment of laxity spawns a lifetime of heresy. Never forget, never forgive

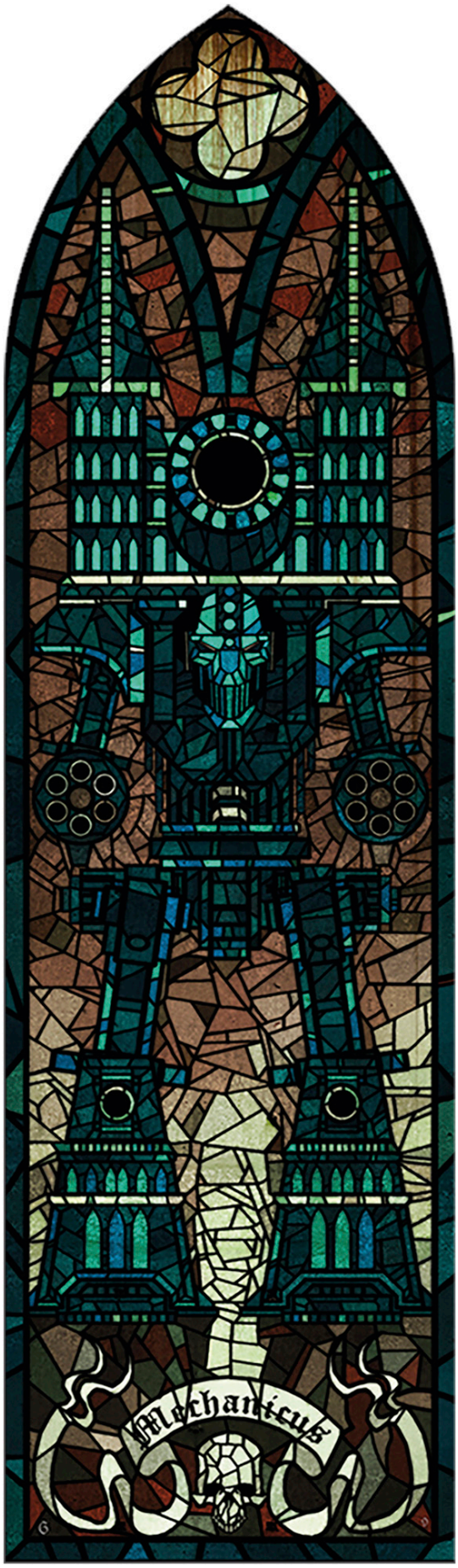
It is my sacred duty to save your soul from the Dark Gods of Chaos... and I will save your soul, even if you die in the process

As our bodies are armoured with adamantium, our souls are protected with loyalty. As our bolters are charged with death for the Emperor's enemies, our thoughts are charged with wisdom.

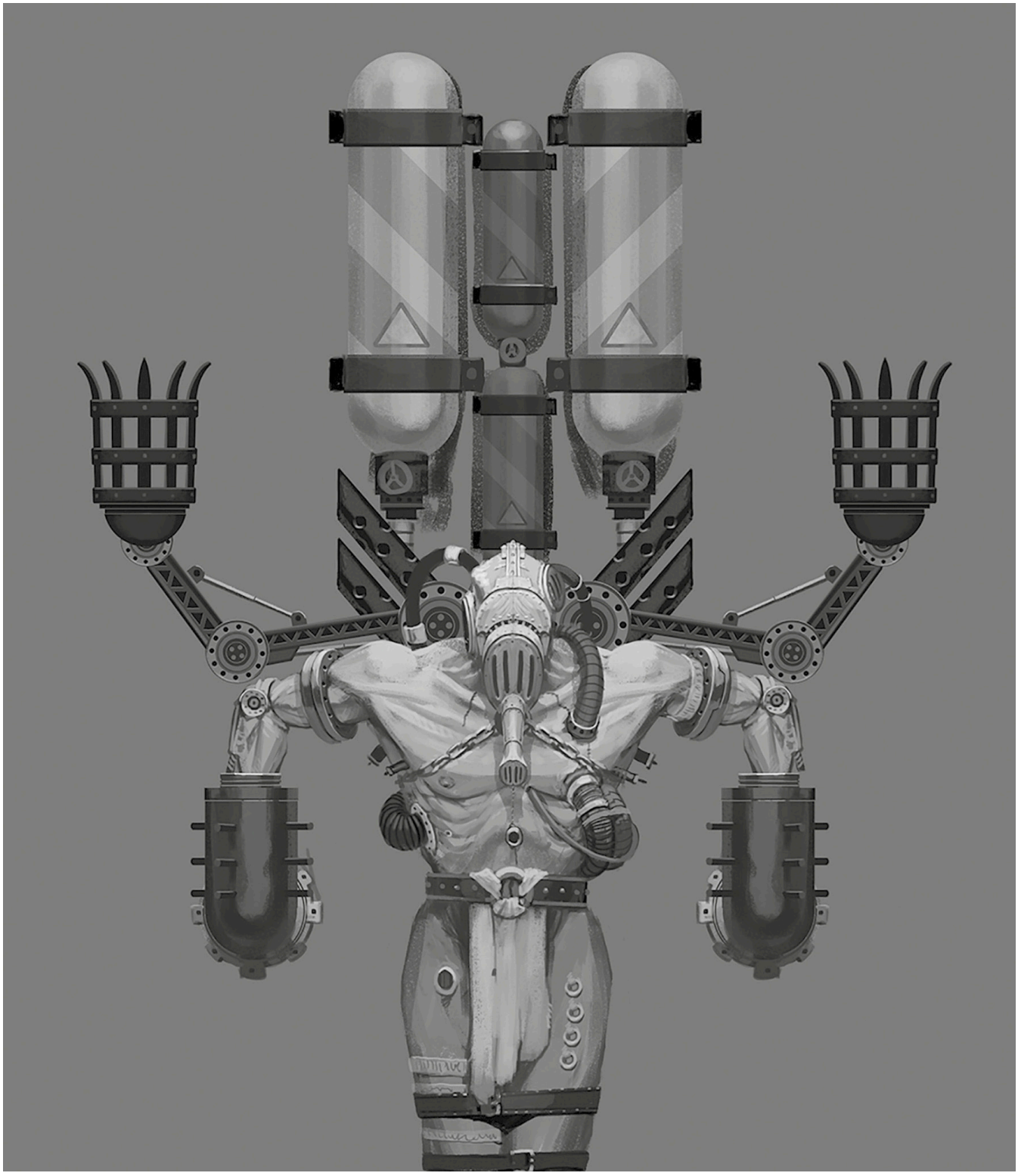
As our ranks advance, so does our devotion, for are we not Marines? Are we not the chosen of the Emperor, his loyal servants unto death?

Blessed parchment

Genestealer pose exploration


Mechanicus

Imperator Titan stained-glass window



Concept of unfortunate serf

Cathedral-like spaceship interior

1
DE·ALAE·MORTIS

Deathwing banner

The original *Chaos Gate* was a squad-level, turn-based tactical simulator that was released on PCs way back in 1998. Fast-forward 24 years later, and the name was resurrected to be used in conjunction with a Grey Knight-focused squad game with strategy gameplay.

The game was developed by the talented Canadian team at Complex Games, who created a very unique artistic style. I'd describe it as an animated comic feel that still keeps the grimdark tinge you would want and expect in a *Warhammer* game – especially one that features the legions of the Plague God, Nurgle.

The enemy variety is fantastic, going from meagre poxwalkers all the way up to – spoilers! – the Daemon Primarch himself, Mortarion. The game features other *Warhammer 40,000* celebrities; including the Grey Knight Supreme Grand Master, Kaldor Draigo; a vile Daemon Prince; and Grand Master Vardan Kai, voiced by none other than Andy Serkis, who fills the role of both mentor and chief berater, ensuring the player knows if they have done well or not.

The game's story was a true epic, starting with the loss of the captain of the ship *The Baleful Edict* during the opening encounter with a Bloodthirster, followed by a meeting with a desperate Inquisitor, and on to a whole sector blighted by a plague known as the Bloom. To cure the systems of the Bloom's terrifying symptoms, the Grey Knights must track down five champions of Nurgle, known as Reapers. It's these grotesque guardians that really take *Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate – Daemonhunters* to the next level. The character design and concepts, showing the different guises of Nurgle, really highlight how you can take and expand on *Warhammer*'s core themes to create something new, cool, and intriguing.

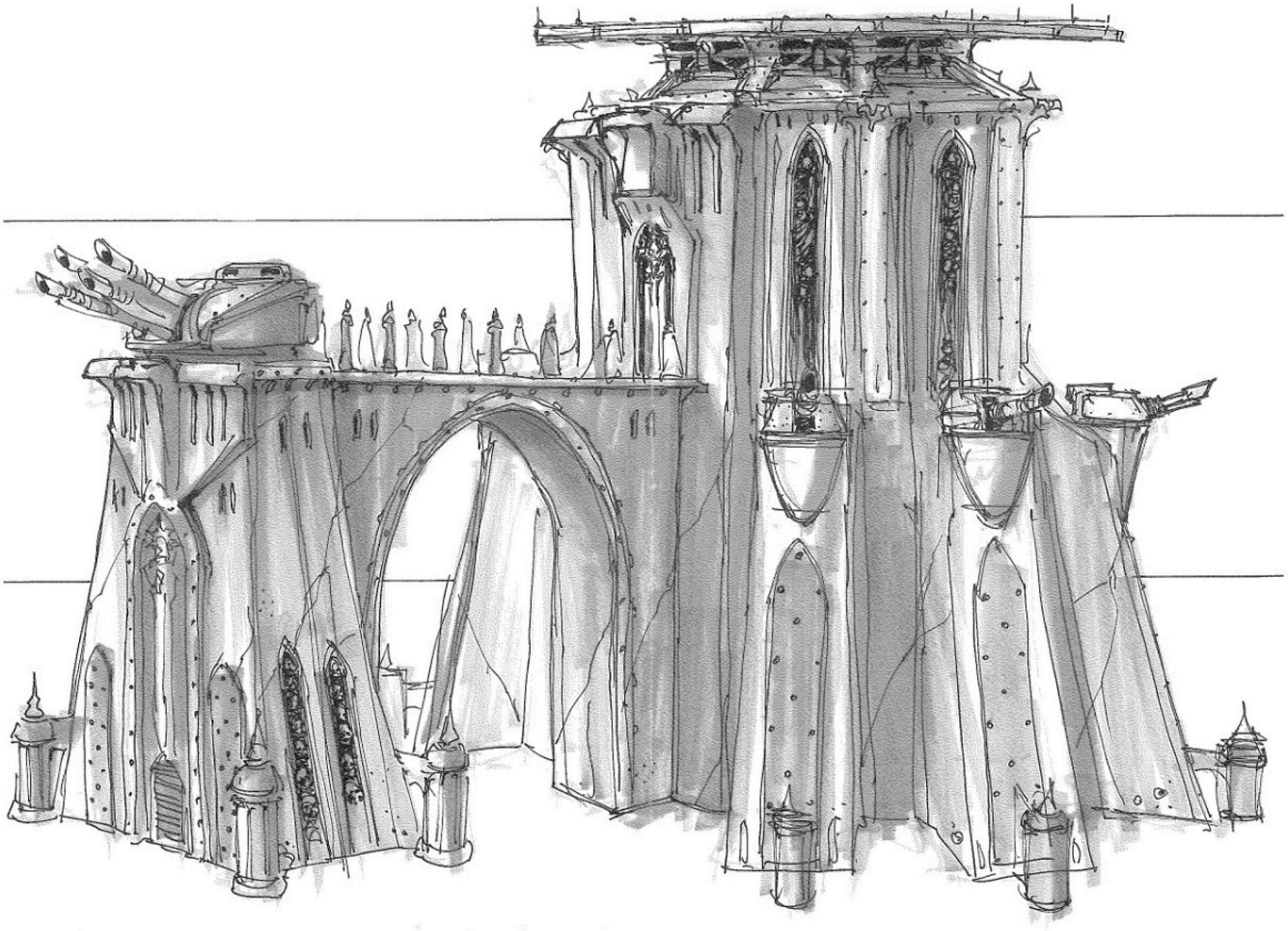
The Grey Knights themselves are worthy of mention; each member of the commander's squad is highly customisable and leans into the heraldic themes that underpin the highly secretive Chapter as a whole. The ability to tailor and nurture your squad brethren, alongside the rich storytelling and compulsive gameplay, has ensured that the game remains a player favourite over the last few years.

Grey Knights stand before Chaos gateway

THE BALEFUL EDICT

The Grey Knights Strike Cruiser, *The Baleful Edict*, is your chariot in the cold void of space. However, the vessel is more than merely a transport to take your brethren from one planet to the next; it is also a character in the game and an important part of the gameplay. The hull has many rooms, and their function can be chosen by the player, depending on cost and other remedial considerations. For example, if a campaign requires servitors, then players can ensure the Servitorium is fully functional and upgraded. Or perhaps players wish to maximise the *Edict*'s gun batteries to ensure the Grey Knights can deliver a mighty punch in void conflicts.

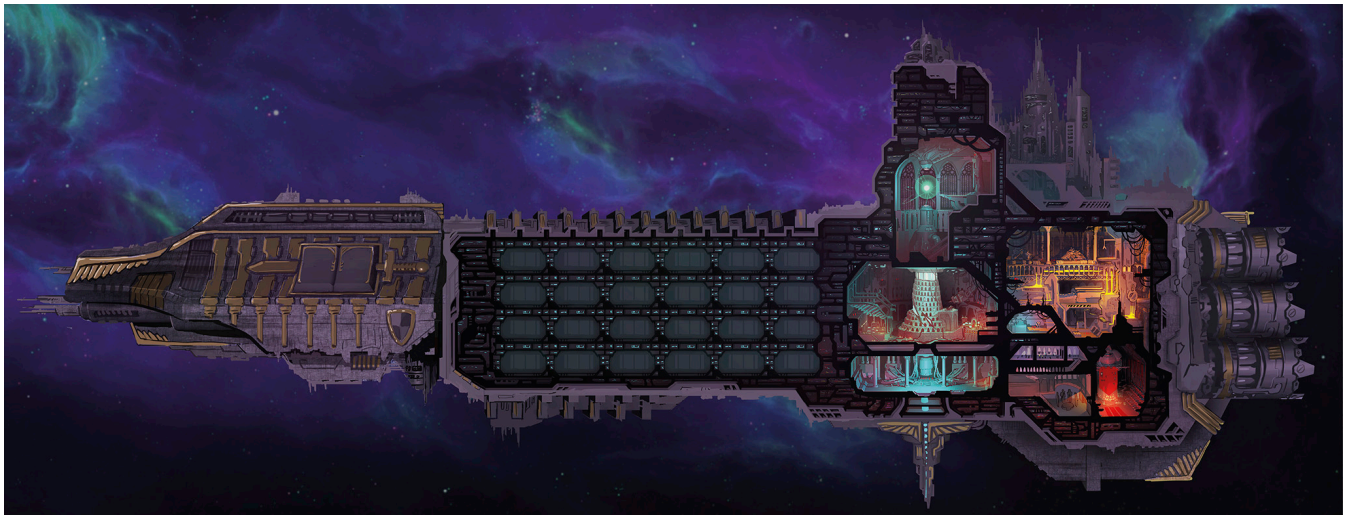
Illustration of Dominus Lunete, custodian of *The Baleful Edict*



Fortified landing pad concept sketch

The Ossuary of *The Baleful Edict*

The ship's Augmentation Chamber



Plan view of the Strike Cruiser, *The Baleful Edict*, showing room slots

IMPERIALA
PURIFIER
TERRA TITAN
STEEL KNIGHT

Captain Agravain artwork

Illustration of Inquisitor Vakir

If you asked players of the PlayStation 2 generation which game was the epitome of *Warhammer 40,000*, they would state *Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior* without hesitation. This large-budget first-person shooter was released in the autumn of 2003, following hot on the heels of other great first-person actioners that defined this generation of consoles.

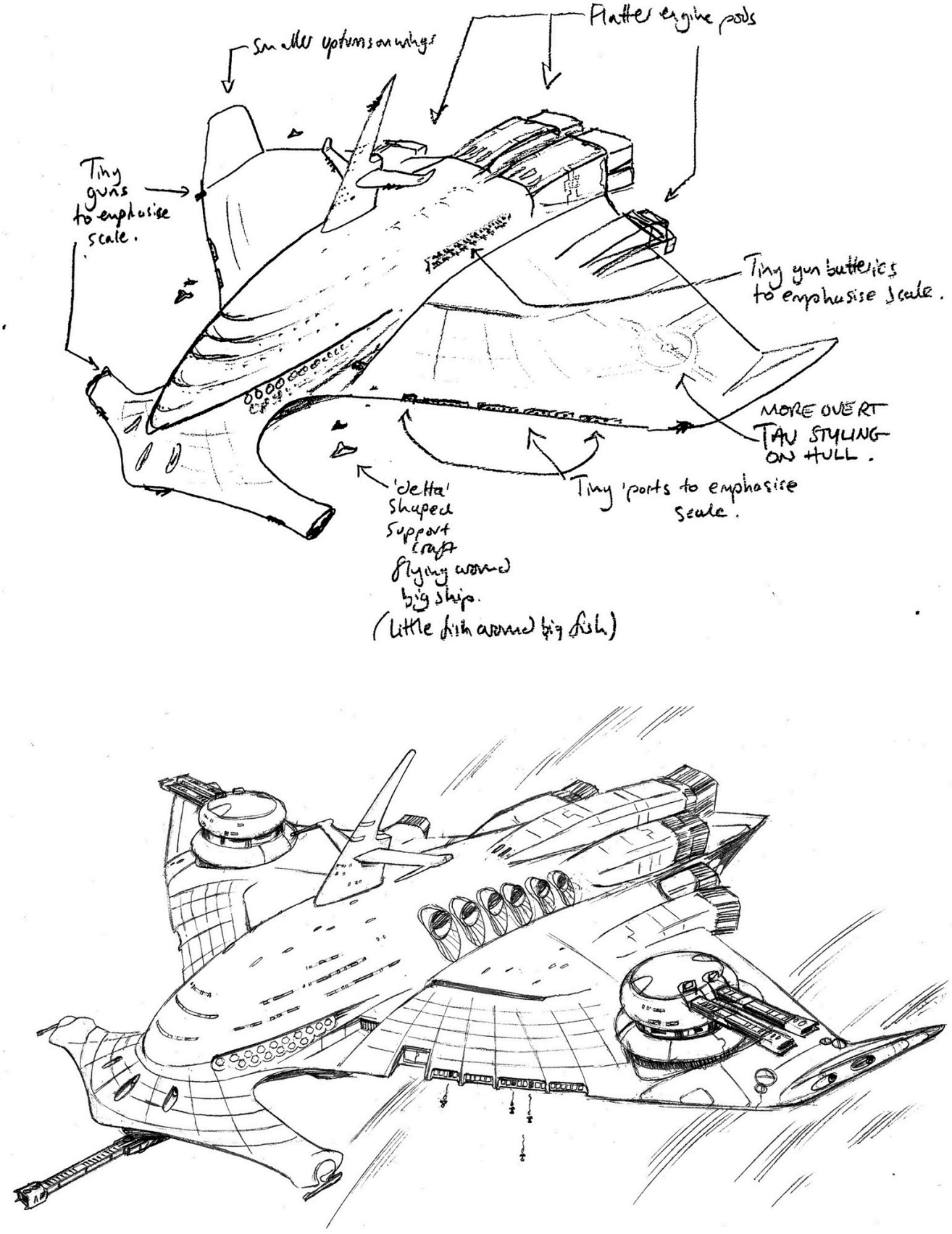
At the time of the game's development, the T'au were still a new force in the galaxy, having only recently been released as a fully-fledged faction in the *Warhammer 40,000* miniature range and codex library. Their introduction to the greater galaxy and the denizens within it was something the developers leant into. The T'au were new, in the sense that they had recently been created, but also in their in-universe perspective of the greater galaxy. They had a naive hope of a greater good against the grim darkness and dystopian outlooks of the other factions.

This helped with one of the game's main goals, to bring *Warhammer 40,000* to gamers who had yet to see a miniature. The premise of a protagonist facing the Imperium, rather than being part of it, was different from other *Warhammer* titles that had been released before it. It effectively put the myriad forces of the Emperor in front of the camera, rather than behind it.

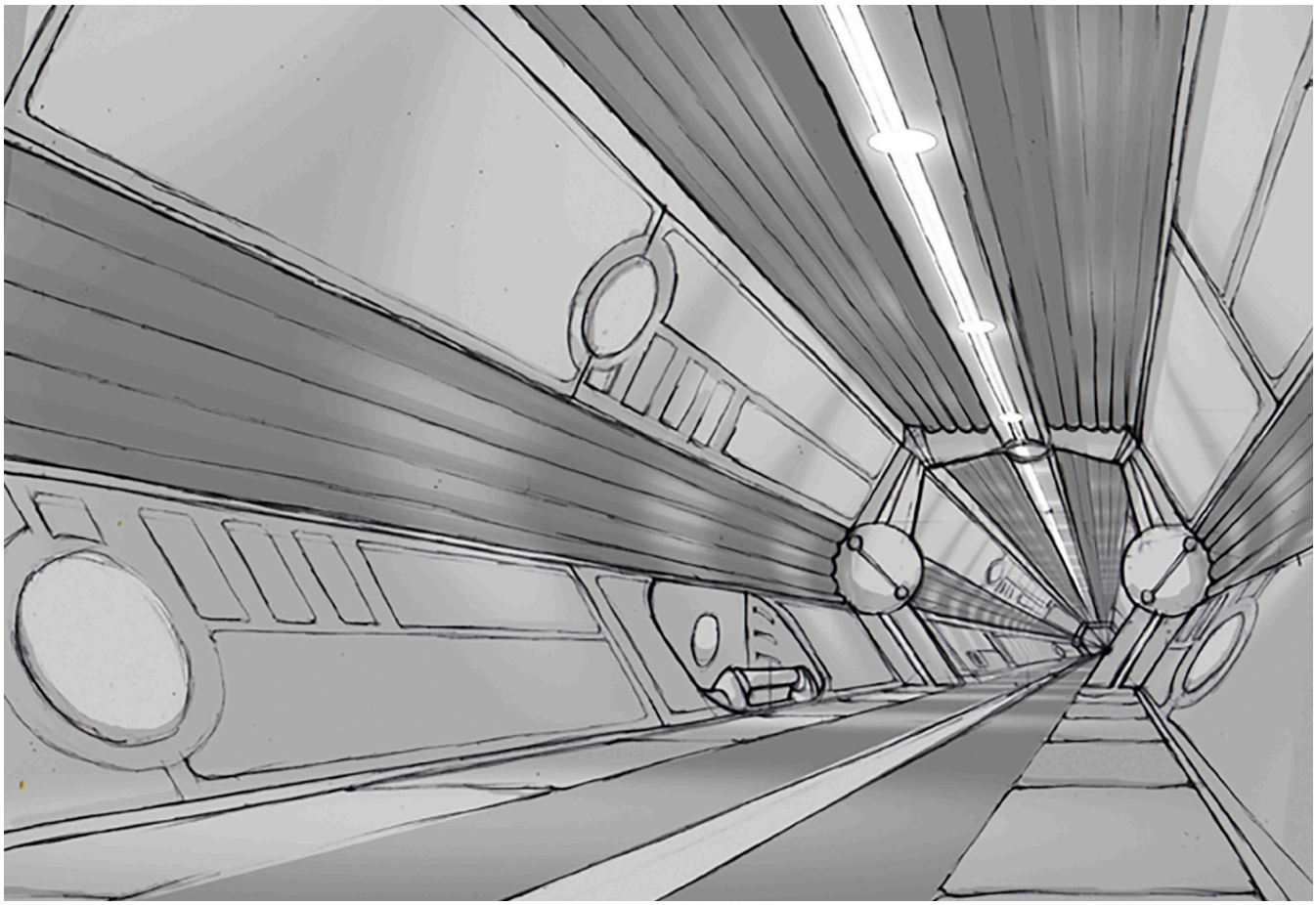
On loading the game up, you knew this was not your average *Warhammer 40,000* game. The introduction may look dated by today's standards, but the narration and distinctive voice acting (VA) declaring this was the "Segmentum Solar", accompanied by a zoom-out across the galaxy of the 41st Millennium, meant you were in for a treat.

The focus on the T'au introduced a few new elements that fans hadn't seen before, such as early designs for T'au void craft, visuals for how the T'au talked and acted beyond the battlefield, and even some weaponry, such as the T'au rail rifles. The Imperium also had new inclusions – the *Valkyrie*, the ubiquitous troop carrier and gunship of the Astra Militarum and Imperial Navy, premiered in this game before going on to become a *Warhammer 40,000* staple.

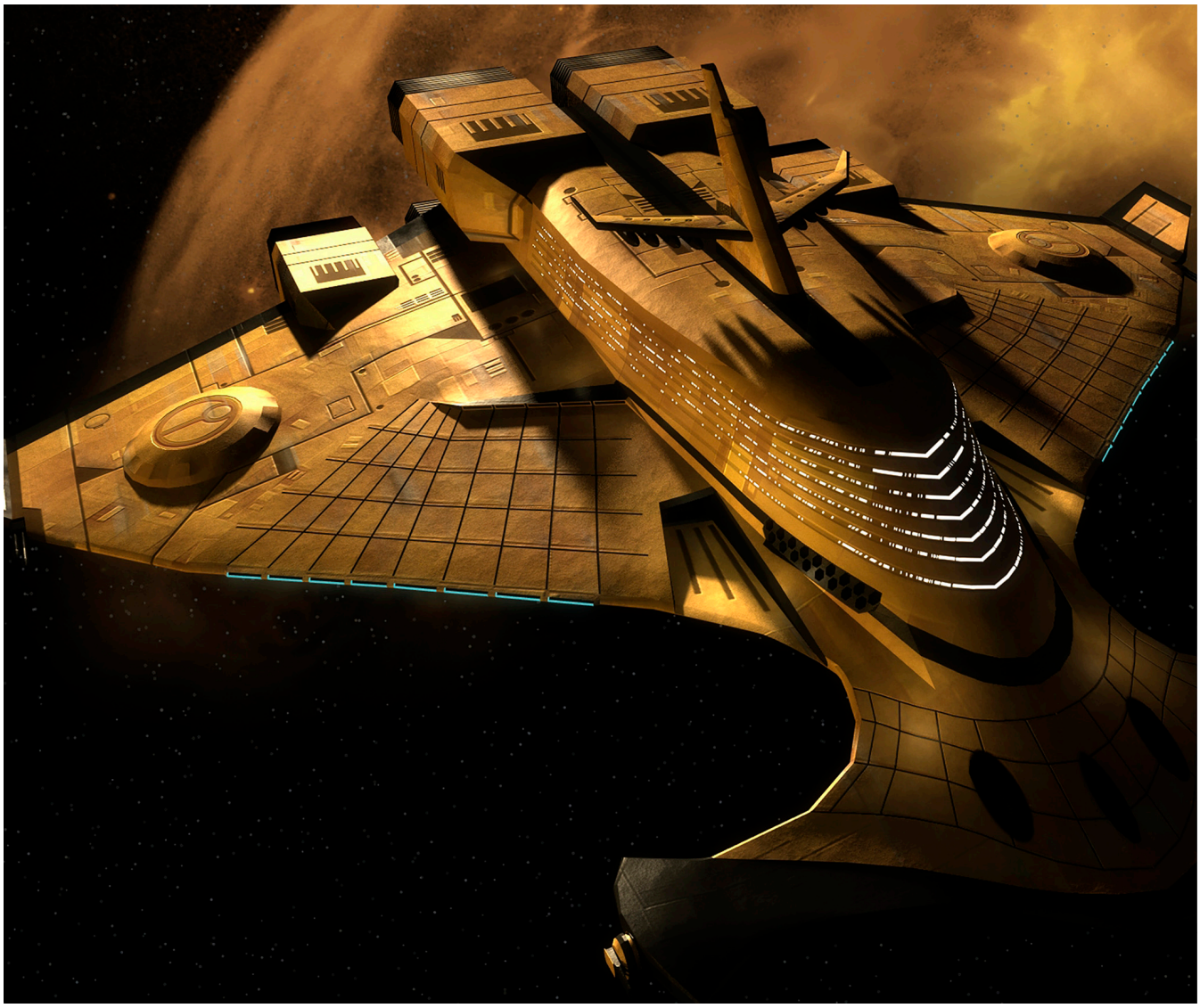
Key art for *Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior*



Sketches of a T'au Emissary-class cruiser

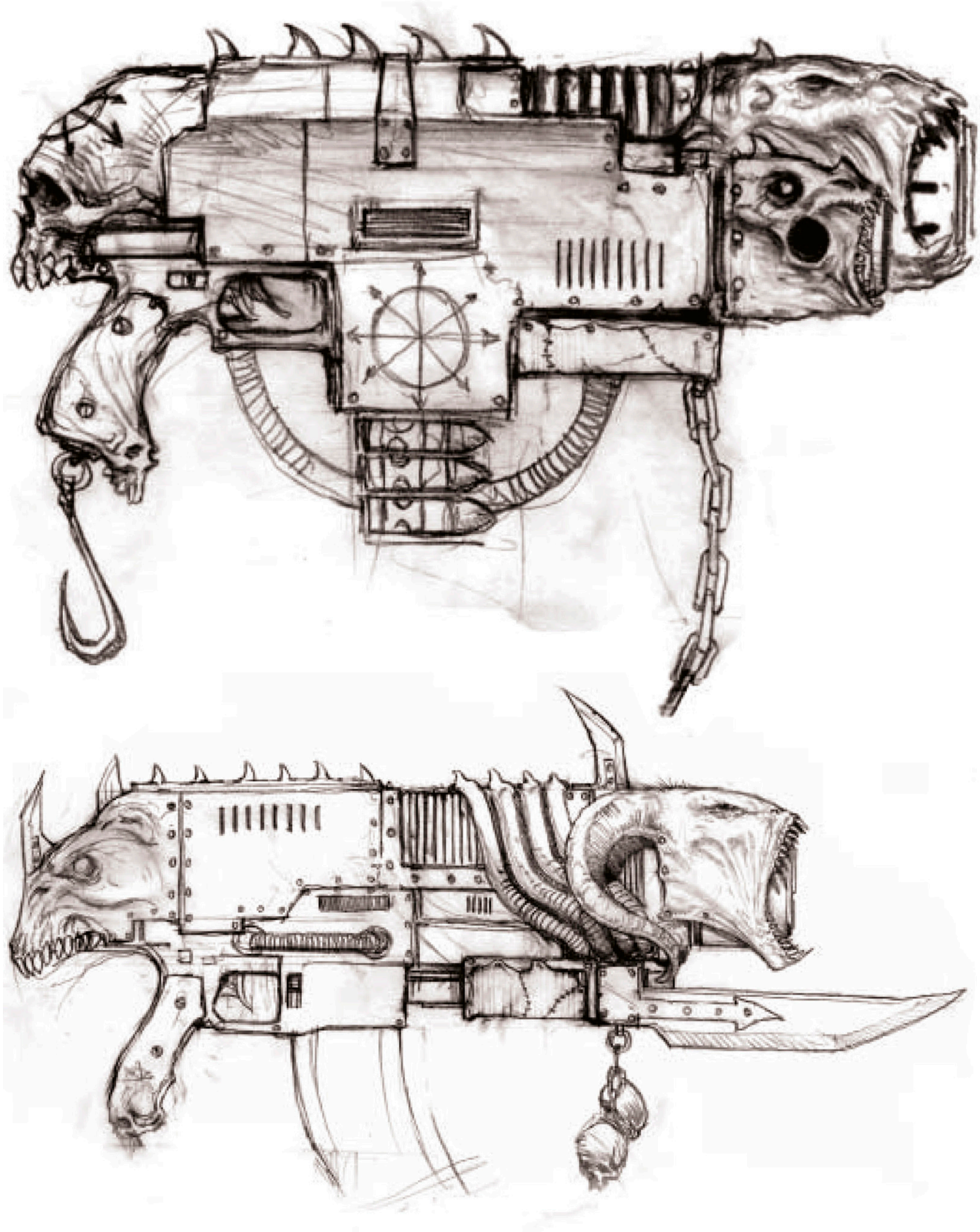


Draft design of the T'au cruiser interior

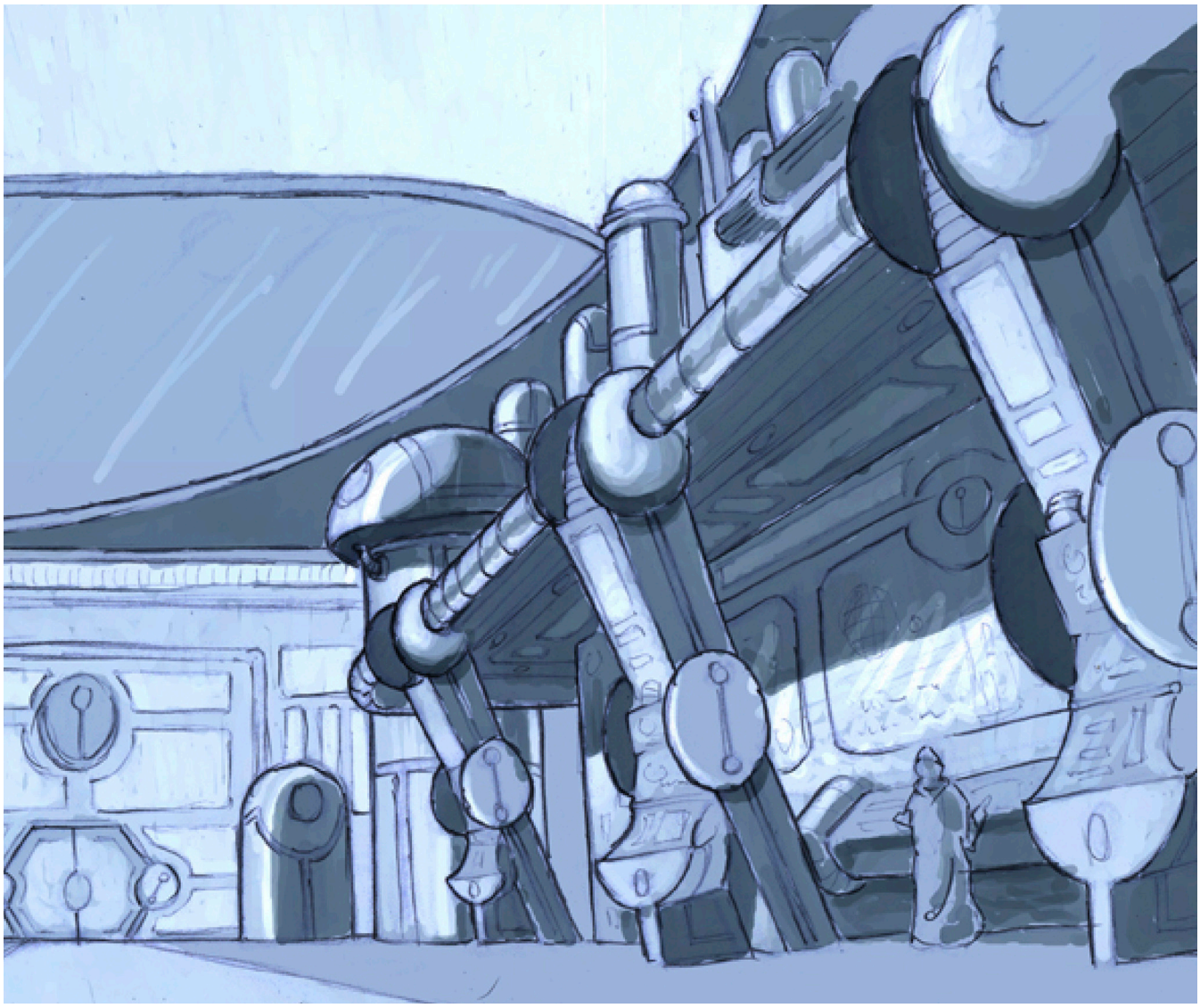


T'au cruiser in *Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior*

Storyboard illustrations



Heretical Weaponry concepts



T'au facility concept

"Contact with the latest xenos threat to the Imperium was made here. A star cluster in a distant spiral arm. The race is young, vigorous, and technologically advanced. They call themselves the T'au."

– XENOS-BIOLOGIS THORM 4-GENER BAKERUS

The Ultramarines seem to have the monopoly on squad-level combat titles, as seen in *Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command*, in which the Sons of Guilliman take to the battlefield. This game is the spiritual successor to the 1990s game *Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate*.

Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command was developed for the elusive handheld console market of the late 2000s, dominated by the Nintendo DS and the PlayStation Portable. Despite it being optimised for smaller screens, the game's look was surprisingly impressive. Battlefields were detailed and intricate, with a *Warhammer 40,000* varnish. The terrain was destructible, which gave the tactics an extra dimension; new fields of fire would open up or enemies could be smoked out of cover by destroying it. Members of the player's squad also had several stances to choose from; for example, the scouts could go into a kneeling stance, thereby creating a more stable posture from which to fire.

The game is turn-based, revolving around the squad's action points (AP), and how the player spends them to get the best out of their team. The usual actions, such as moving, are covered by the points, but players could make a tactical decision to sink their AP into increasing the accuracy of a battle-brother, ensuring they get a critical hit when required. These types of action come with risks, such as reducing the AP pool for other squad members.

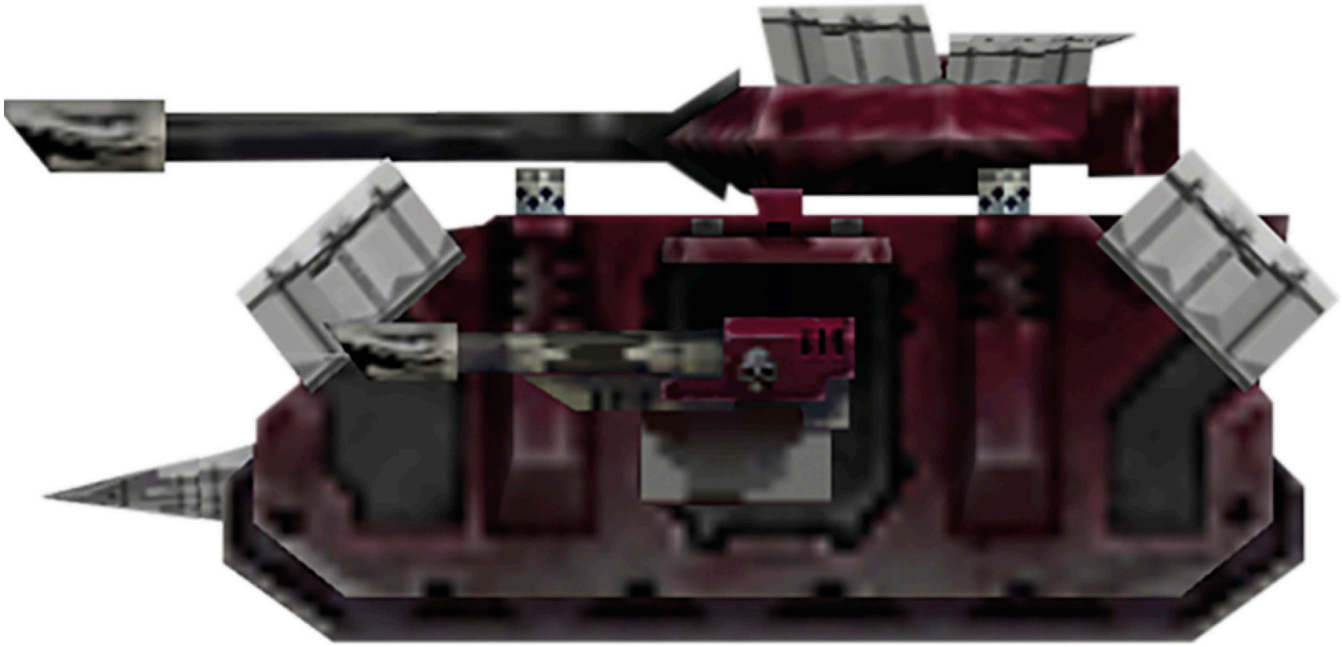
If a squad ends its turn with enough AP, then the warriors can go into Overwatch mode, a mechanic that will be familiar to *Space Hulk* players. The Space Marines go into a "weapons hot" mode, ready to fire at any foe that enters into their sights during the enemy's turn.

This gives *Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command* a tight focus on skirmish actions. There are games with greater scope or more epic battles out there, but if you wanted to kill some Chaos Space Marines while on your daily commute, there was, frankly, no greater game.

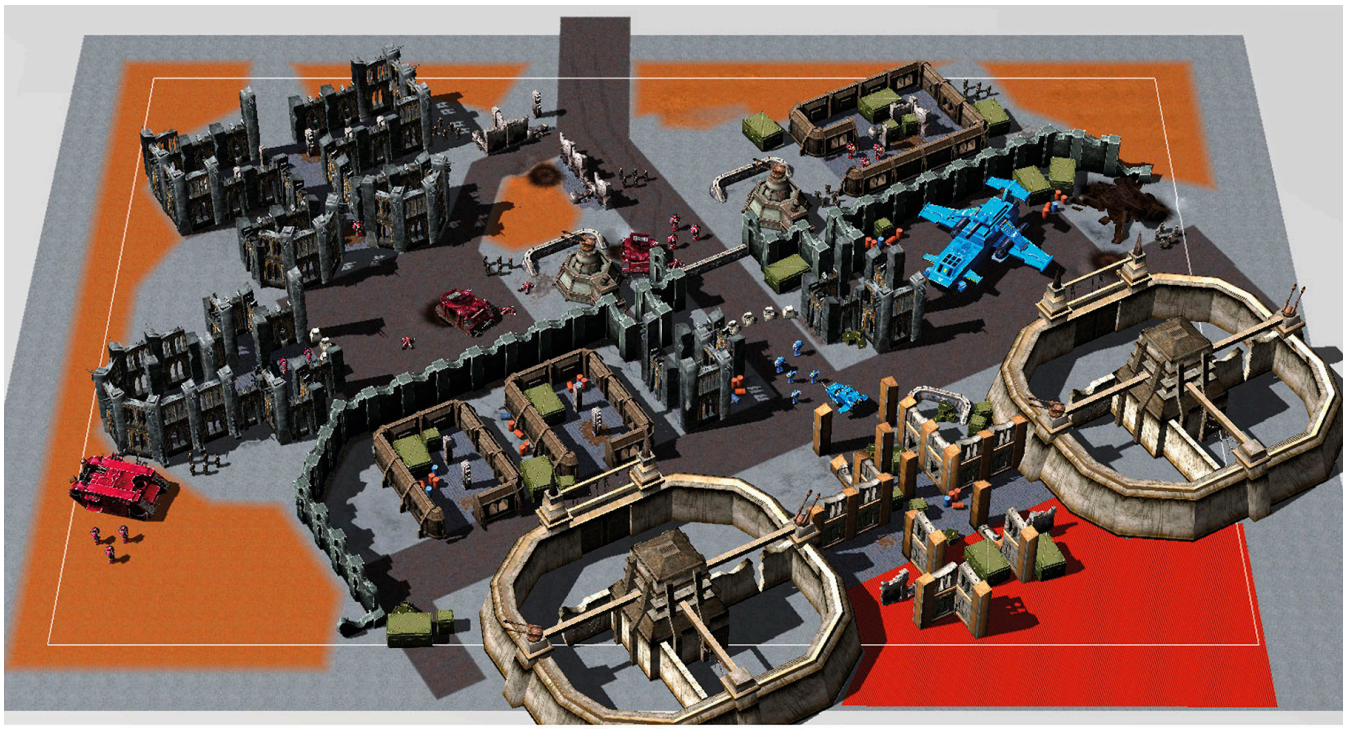
Ultramarines 2nd Company

PIXEL-TRAIT

A game's art style is optimised to the platform it's played on. This is easier to do on some projects than others. *Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command* was designed exclusively for the Nintendo DS, and so the art style, especially around the user interface (UI) areas using the dual screens, was designed with this in mind. For example, the pixel portraits highlighted here not only keyed into the aesthetic of the game and era, but were clear and useful for unit selection.



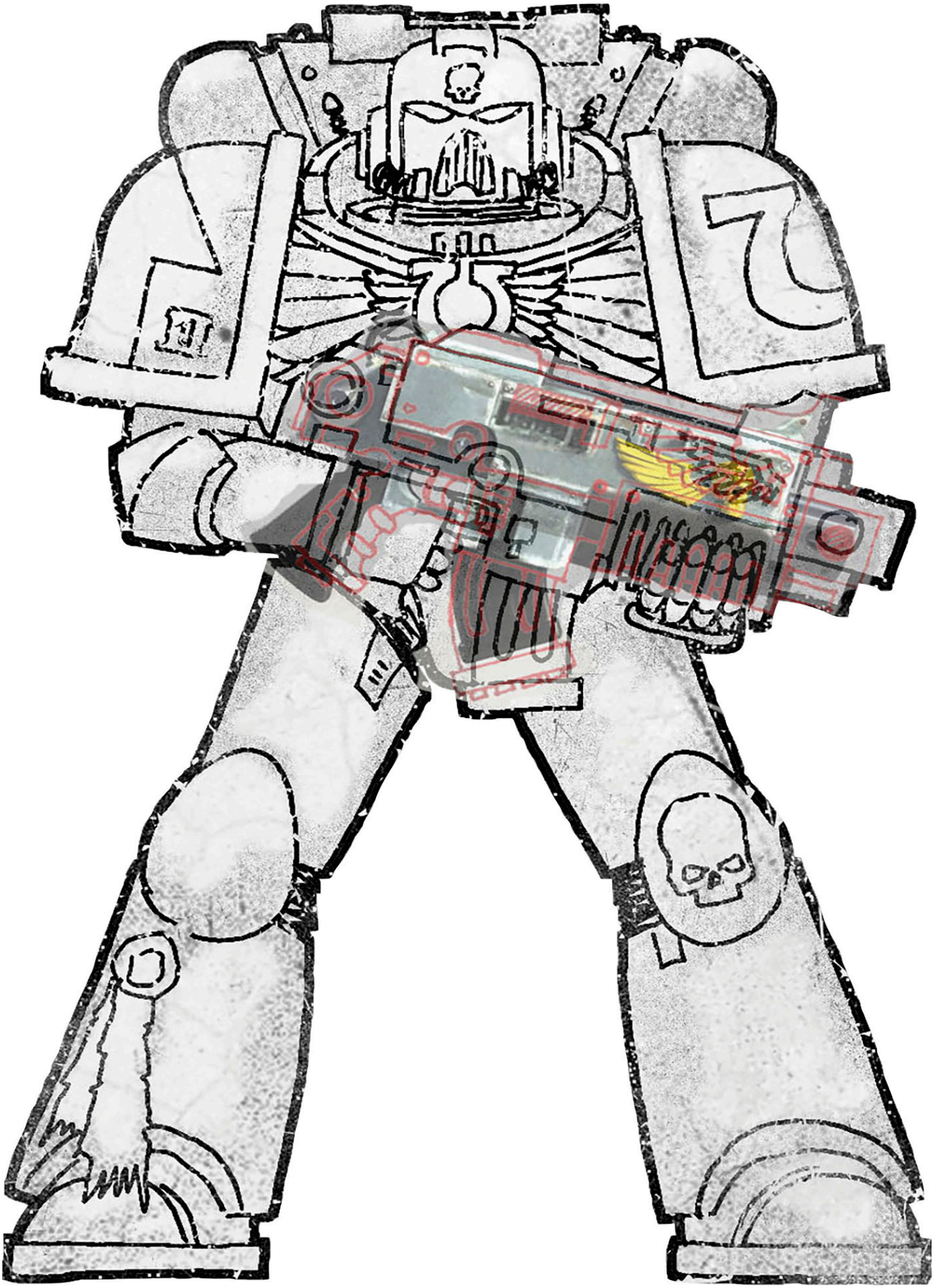
Chaos Predator render



Second screen map layouts

Blood-mad Heretic Astartes

Squad selection icons



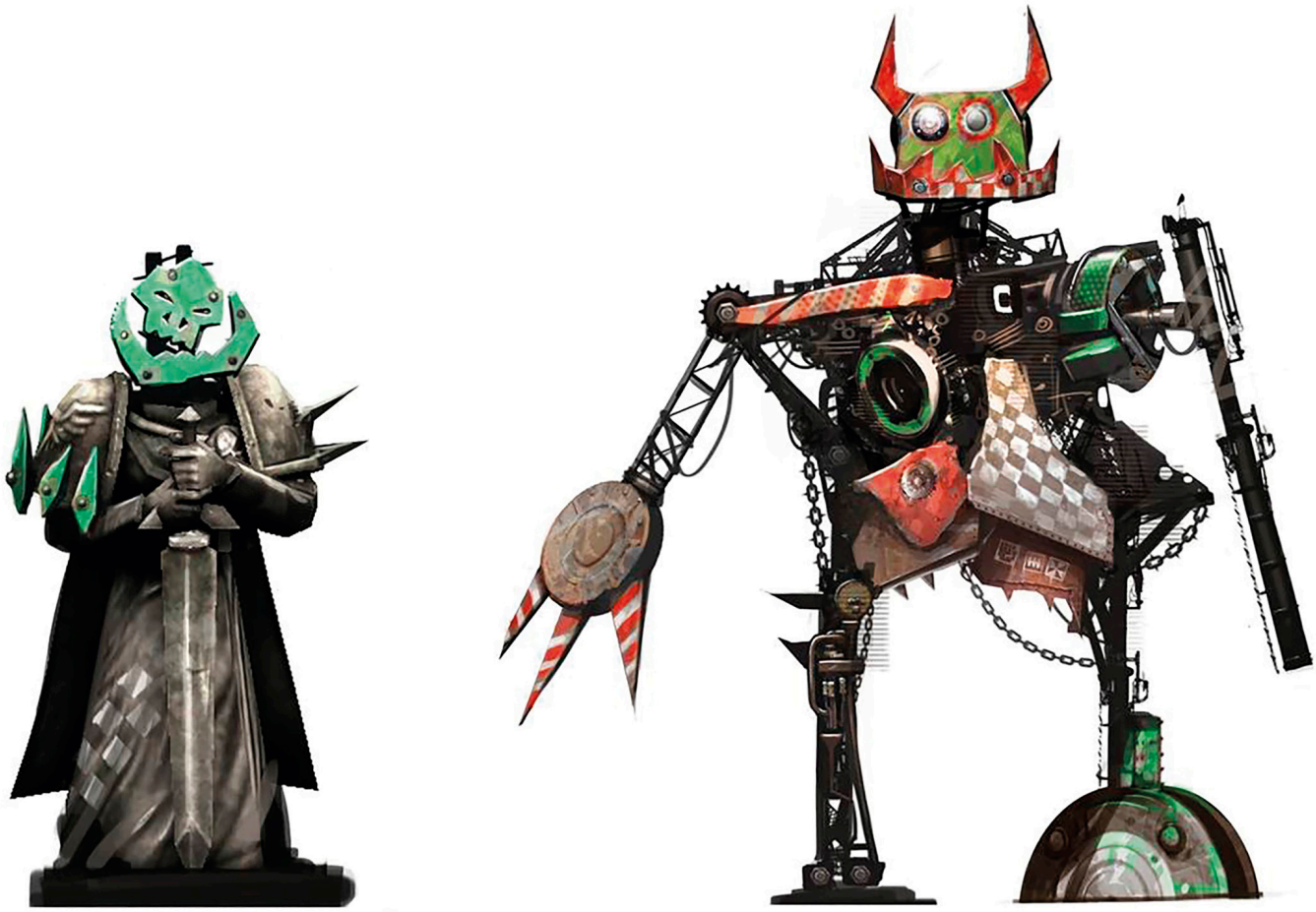
Space Marine scale line art

WARHAMMER 40,000 KILL TEAM

This two-player twin-stick shooter was released all the way back in 2011, and served as a soft-prequel to the very first *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine* game. While the game, based in the 41st Millennium, featured simple software and gameplay, it offered a lot of visceral fun. Swinging your controller stick around to hose a horde of greenskins in holy bolter fire is always an enjoyable way to spend time. This is especially the case when you are joined by a second battle-brother, be it a friend or an eager relative – a young son in my case!

Warhammer 40,000: Kill Team actually used assets from *Dawn of War II*, placing them in a fresh, more action-oriented context. Two Space Marines, from a Chapter denoted by the players, go on an arcade-fuelled rampage through the bowels of the Ork Kill Kroozer, cutting down grots, Ork boyz, and even a Stompa. There are four types of classes available for players to make up their kill team: Librarian, Vanguard veteran, Sternguard veteran, and Techmarine. Each has their nuances for play, but in general the Sternguard and Techmarine focused on shooting, while the Vanguard and Librarian were better at close combat.

In any case, no matter how you and your partner formed the lineup of your kill team, the game provided many hours of intense fun. There is something very satisfying in killing that many Orks!



Two ork effigies, the one to the left defiling a Space Marine statue

Illustration of a daemonic incursion

Space Marine faces Tyranid in battle

Collection of Ork banners

An Ork-sploded moon

In *Warhammer 40,000*, Imperial Knights are not the chivalrous, shining warriors of yore but ancient 40ft tall bipedal war machines. For much of *Warhammer 40,000*'s existence, they were an obscure part of the setting, first introduced in the *Adeptus Titanicus* box game, but other than occasionally appearing in the next edition of the *Epic* game system, they were rarely heard of or championed. This changed in 2014, when, due to improvements in plastic injection technology and techniques, a *Warhammer 40,000*-scale Imperial Knight kit was released by Games Workshop. This massive kit thrust Imperial Knights back into the limelight where, arguably, they should have been all along.

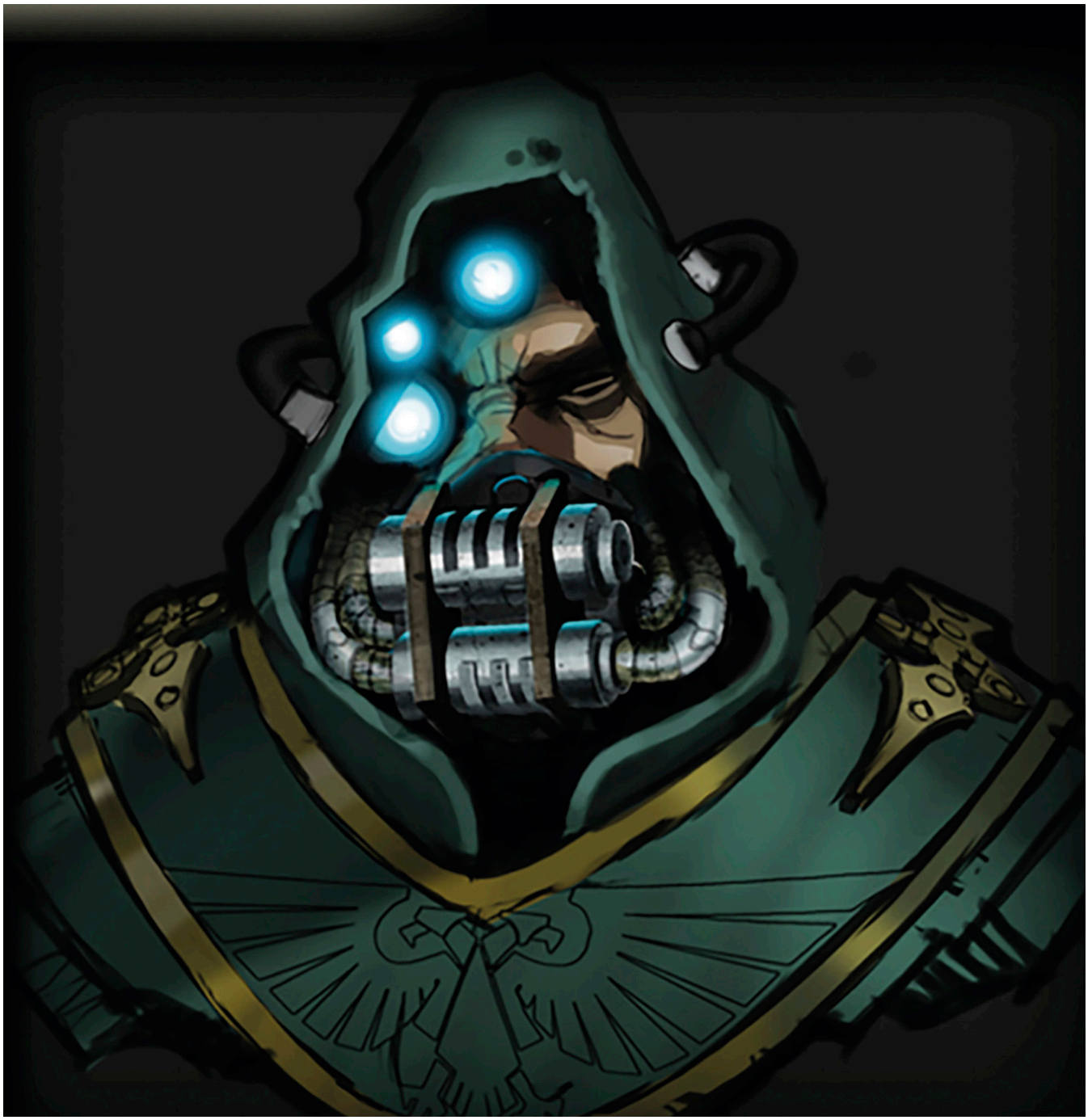
Compared to the Titans – which have multiple crew, including the princeps and moderati – an Imperial Knight has a single pilot; the machines are almost like battlesuits, extensions of the noble that directs them. I think that is what makes them more interesting than the larger Titans, which are more like walking buildings, albeit bristling with guns.

This extra level of personality is further defined by the archetypes it plays into – they are called Knights, after all – and like their medieval counterparts, they are formed from nobility. The noble houses of the Knight Worlds form a key part of the background. These are feudal worlds, where dynasties of nobles will often find contentions with each other when not fighting against a greater threat. Freeblades are those nobles that fight in a mercenary manner; perhaps they are exiled from their noble house or even the last of their dynasty. This is where we find Vortigan, the Freeblade of this game's title.

Warhammer 40,000: Freeblade is an on-rails shooter developed for Apple devices but also released on Android. The graphics on release in 2015 were so impressive that this game was used by Apple to showcase their A9 chip, and those graphics stand up well, even ten years later. The clean style features strong colours – lots of cyan, yellows, and greens – but with a focus on bringing the source miniatures to life.

The game has a strong narrative featuring the Dark Angels, Orks, and daemons of the Blood God. Vortigan must thwart the Chaos forces from collecting eight marks – corrupted fragments that, if brought together, would see a Bloodthirster summoned. It's a tale that highlights the gameplay of piloting an Imperial Knight. Don't let the "on-rails" descriptor of the game's genre dissuade you; this is a fun, active shooter that perfectly suits the game's protagonist who wields a walking war robot from antiquity.

Imperial Knights poise for battle



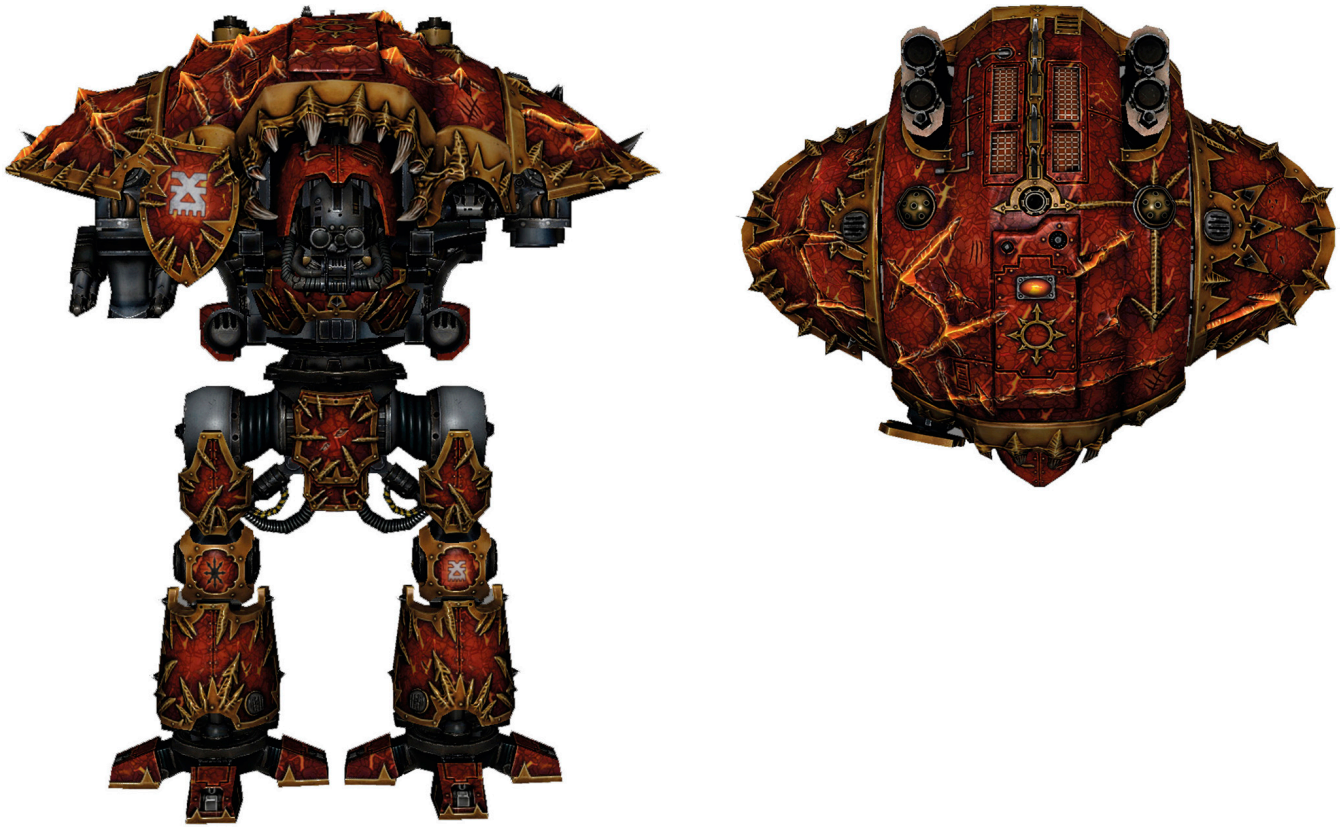
Portrait of an Imperial Knight's Sacristan

Space Marine line drawing

Ork Warboss

Key art of the Freeblade

A Chaos Knight icon



Front and top views of line art study of Khornate Knight

"On the world of Tarnis, a Knight-Apparent undergœs the gruelling Ritual of Becoming, hoping to be reborn as an Imperial Knight."

– THE SCREED OF TARNIS

After the success of *Vermintide* and its sequel, the developers, Sweden's Fatshark, looked toward the 41st Millennium.

While *Vermintide* was inspired by games set in the zombie genre, where specialists would fight off hordes of the enemy – in *Warhammer* that was the Skaven – in *Warhammer 40,000* the enemy-tides that must be slain are the forces of Nurgle, the Plague God.

Corrupted Humans, poxwalkers, and the heretical forces of the Moebian 6th Regiment are the enemies that have taken over Tertium, a hive city on the planet of Atoma Prime. Meanwhile, the players take on the role of "rejects" – outcasts and criminals forcibly conscripted into the myriad armed retinues of the mysterious Inquisitor Grendyl. They are tasked with fighting against Nurgle's incursion of the hive.

It's the focus of *Warhammer 40,000: Darktide* that makes this game look and feel unique. Other *Warhammer 40,000* games take place on multiple planets, feature wars against the xenos, and often feature the Angels of Death, the Space Marines. *Warhammer 40,000: Darktide* is set firmly in one location, Tertium, in the darkness of a hive under attack and the tides of filth that infiltrate it.

This game shows the slow fall into corruption and the futility of what the Imperium and its expendable mortal agents are up against. The art style represents this; the hive locations are covered in rust, grime, and contagion, and the enemies are filth and disgust personified. Meanwhile, the Inquisitor's requisitioned ship in orbit, the *Mourningstar*, is full of baroque environments and stuttering cogitators. This is no clean and sleek future; this is pure grimdark.

Even the agents you play are no heroic paragons. They are convicts and scum, and are treated as such by the cast of characters that set the missions and dish out the wargear. As always in *Warhammer 40,000*, life is cheap, and you will not be missed. The agents you work for constantly remind you of that, even if you return to orbit from a successful mission purging Tertium of the Darktide.

The rejects sent to face the foe

ATOMA PRIME

The capital of the Moebian Domain, a sub-sector of space in Segmentum Solar, is Atoma Prime. The hive world is under siege by the forces of the Admonition, a cult dedicated to the Chaos God, Nurgle. The cult has seduced a whole regiment, the Moebian 6th, to its cause. They are now classified as Traitoris Militarum and desperately fight over the planet's main hive, Tertium.

Hive Tertium is the main battlefield, a vast urban hellscape that covers much of the planet's surface. Previously an important administrative and industrial hub, it has now gone dark, leaving much of the Moebian Domain in anarchy.

Deathstrike Missile

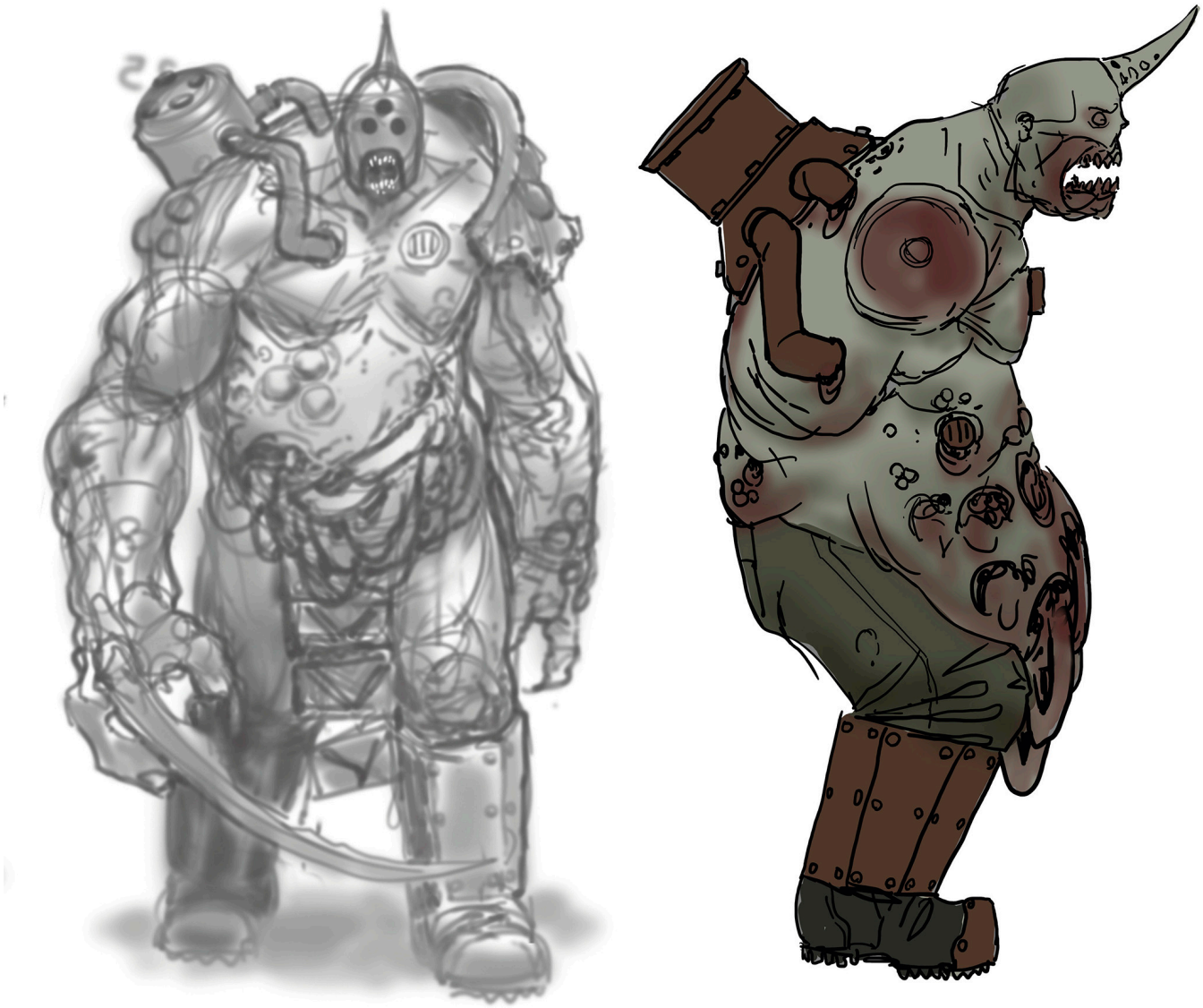
Exterior of Hive Tertium

Arbites Prison

Sketches of Bulwarkin melee form

Enemy poxwalker concept art

Plague Ogryn detailed concept art



Plague Ogryn sketches and early design

Mutant Charger concept art

THE TRAITOR'S WAY

In *Warhammer 40,000*, it's often the Space Marines and their Chaos counterparts that take centre stage. Yet, in the lore there are far fewer Space Marines than everyday Humans in a galaxy that's constantly burning with the flames of war. The vast majority of the Imperium's utterly countless number of subjects will never witness an Angel of Death or – luckily for them – a Chaos Space Marine.

However, corruption remains rife. What *Warhammer 40,000: Darktide* does so well is portray the slow dissolution into acts of rebellion and then full-on traitorous onslaught. It rarely starts with daemons appearing in the midst of busy plazas – although that has happened – but is often more insidious, vying for the hearts of those once-loyal, twisting their needs against those in authority. Food riots, mass sackings, press-ganging for the tithe, mistreatment of soldiers or witch hunts, and many more acts are where the wronged turn from the Emperor's light and slowly find succour with grassroots societies or secret cults, who promise a better life, but in reality are the first step on the path to another kind of damnation.

Concept art of Interrogator Rannick, Explicator Zola, and Sergeant Major Morrow

An exploration of different Human male faces

"Tertium is quite airy as far as hive cities go."

– SERGEANT MAJOR MORROW

I AM A WARRIOR

The forces of Inquisitor Grendyl are sent down to Hive Tertium from the requisitioned voidship, the *Mourningstar*, which is used as an orbital base of operations. Those conscripts are called by the deliberate term "rejects", for their lives matter not and only the completion of their objectives matters. It is also a way for Grendyl's command staff to control and keep those he sends to fight loyal – to a certain point. It is a reminder of where they came from, and how expendable they truly are.

Exploration of different psyker outfits and gear

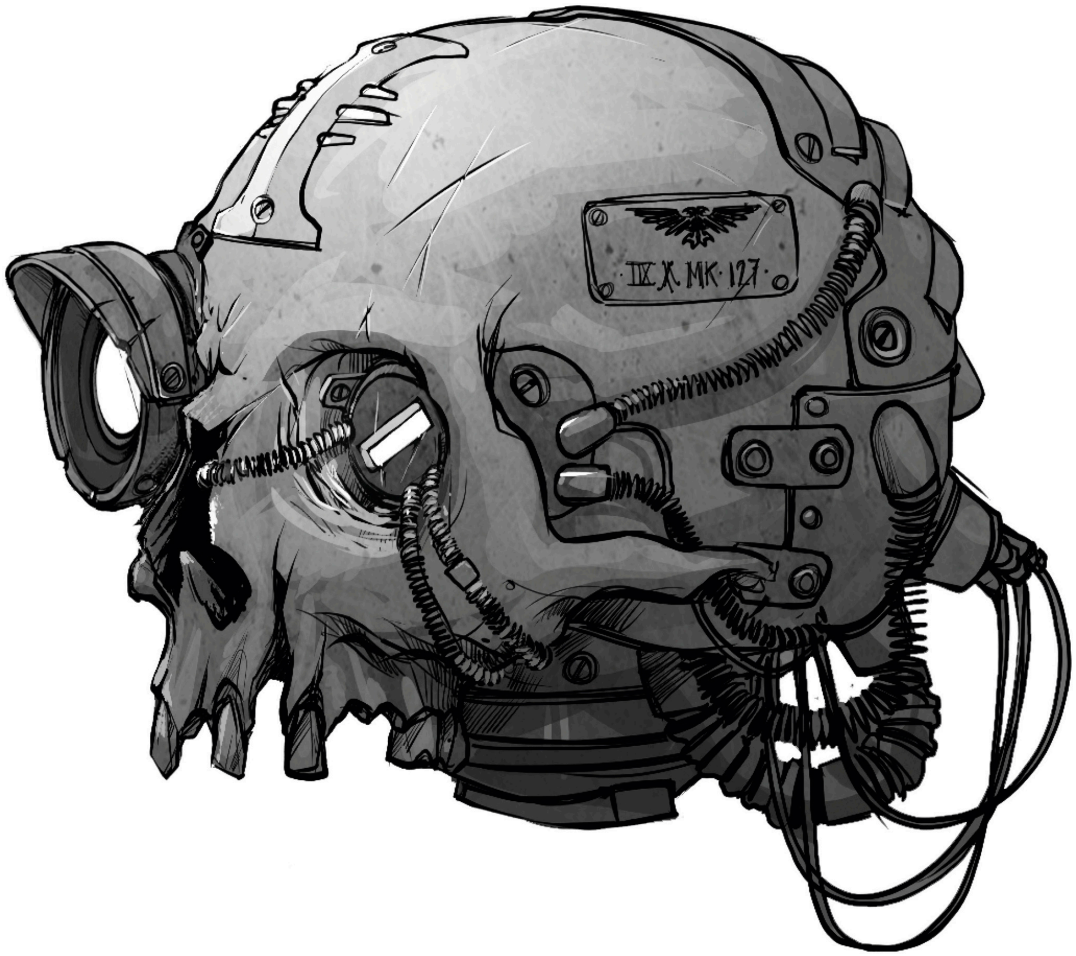
Lasguns in camouflage and orange colourways

HIVE LOCALES

Hive cities are monolithic, industrialised, and urban megalopolises whose levels and spires often reach high into a planet's atmosphere. There are many famous (and infamous) hives throughout the Imperium – those on the hive worlds Necromunda and Armageddon being but two notable examples. Hive Tertium is another. Yet, even for a hive, it is a vast sprawling place, with countless locations and districts: from the Chasm Terminus, a massive transport hub, to Throneside, a more affluent area, or the Coldiron Stack on the western marches of the hive. All these differing areas are reflected in the level design, to give the game variety and ever-changing tactical challenges.

Artwork of one of the spires of Atoma Prime

Pox Hound illustration



Servo-skull

There is something about the star-faring vessels of the 41st Millennium that sets them apart from all other sci-fi settings, novels, and movies. It certainly has something to do with their unfathomable scale, their British navy trappings, and the fact they are cathedral-like monoliths. The ships are decked out with gigantic guns that traverse the Warp, the so-called Sea of Souls where daemons try and rip through the protective gellar fields to feast on the sweet fruits – the souls of the crew and any passengers – inside.

This game was based on Games Workshop's original *Battlefleet Gothic*, a space naval combat game. As part of that game's development, the space layer of *Warhammer 40,000* was fleshed out from the disparate sources found in novels, codexes, and even an earlier space battle game, *Space Fleet*, which used a "throwing dice in the box-lid" mechanic that didn't really catch on.

For *Battlefleet Gothic*, the design inspiration was the maritime battles of World War 1 – the age of ironclad battleships, destroyers, and escorts. This was translated into the video game, where the ships don't zip about the screen, but move at a stately pace, by design. The player has to anticipate where the enemy will be when targeting the fleet's macro weapons and launching torpedoes. Inertia can be an ally or foe. This gave the game some unique tactics for a real-time strategy (RTS).

Battlefleet Gothic: Armada still looks great despite being a decade old. This is a testament to the work of the developer, Tindalos Interactive, who made it the first strategy game built using Unreal Engine 4. Even now the skyboxes of the cosmos really stand out as haunting and intriguing; this may be a game set in space, but it's not just a black void filled with white dots.

Another arresting point was the single-player campaign, which played out as a story with lush 2D cutscenes, following the twists and turns of the Gothic War. In this sequence, the player takes on the role of Admiral Spire, following his career from captain to becoming the Lord Admiral Ravensburg's most-trusted servant. It is hard to integrate story and strategy – the narrative elements pull against the sandbox nature of an RTS. Nevertheless, *Battlefleet Gothic: Armada* achieved it.

Battlefleet Gothic:Armada iconic key art

THE VERDIGRIS OF CHAOS

Those who fall to Chaos are inevitably marked by it, including the machines and ships that are used in the service of the Ruinous Powers. Hulls can warp and become imbued with trapped souls and daemonic hunger. The effect is influenced by the dark powers they serve. For example, Nurgle ships are often corroded and diseased, while the vessels of Slaanesh take on a more exotic and horrifying glamour.

For artists and model makers, this is a great opportunity to take something with a familiar and standard shape and remake it, using the inspirations and thematic signatures of the Chaos Gods.

An *Acheron*-class heavy cruiser in service to Tzeentch, Khorne, Slaanesh, and Nurgle, with details

Freebooter Kaptin

Corsair Prince

Ecclesiarchy Bishop

Traitor Crew

The sequel to *Battlefleet Gothic:Armada* was set eight centuries later, during the pivotal events known as the Gathering Storm. This was a dark time for the Imperium when Cadia fell, the Astronomicon wavered, and Abaddon the Despoiler, Warmaster of Chaos, finally did what even Horus could not achieve, and sundered the Imperium to claim victory. But all was not lost for the forces of Mankind, for a Primarch was roused from a long sleep, and Archmagos Belisarius Cawl revealed his new Adeptus Astartes paradigm, the Primaris Space Marines.

This was an epic worthy of any Hollywood-budget movie, yet the storytellers at Tindalos Interactive bravely took it on using their arresting 2D cinematics first seen in the previous game. This time the story campaigns could be played in multiplayer mode, allowing friends to experience the legendary narrative together.

There are many protagonists in the Gathering Storm, but for *Battlefleet Gothic:Armada II*, Admiral Spire was the game's hero once more, overcoming the intervening centuries lost in the Warp and entering realspace at a time of the Imperium's greatest need.

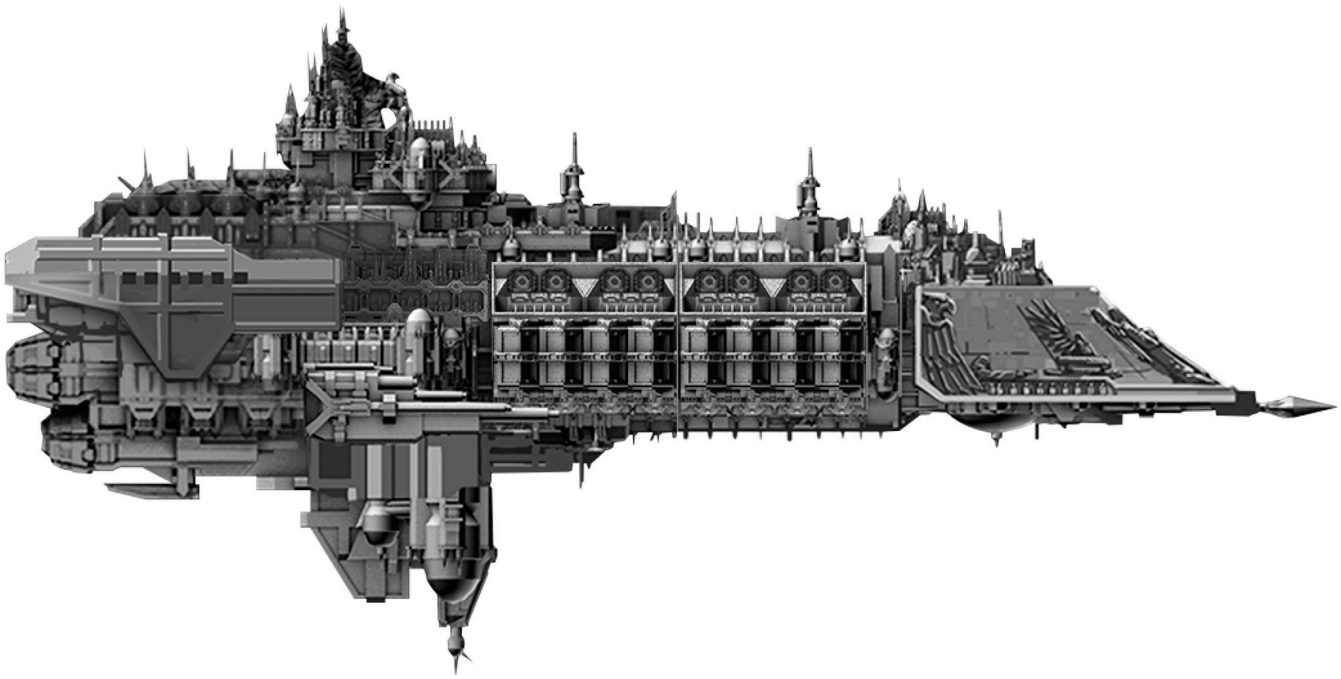
It wasn't just the story that was going "all ahead full"; the graphics had been given an overhaul and looked sharper and even more polished – less 2015 and more like a game going into the 2020s. The backgrounds, which gloriously stood out in the previous edition, were even more lush here, showing the void and nebulae in colourful glory.

The grander story also flowed into the gameplay. In the first game, the focus was more on the individual ships and their specialisations, but in the sequel you customise at a fleet level. The ships are hardier and can take more punishment, making fleet actions last a bit longer.

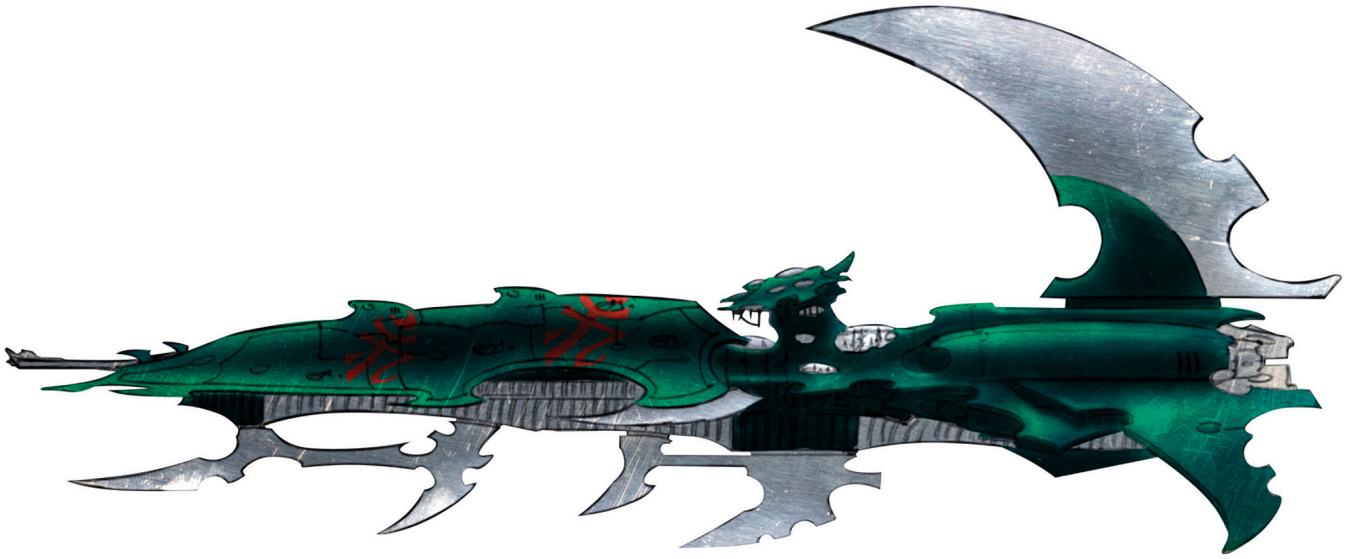
Battlefleet Gothic:Armada II also brought breadth to the series. The first game wisely focused on the original war from the tabletop game's narrative, including those who participated in it. But the sequel and its expansion allowed more of *Warhammer 40,000*'s factions to participate: Adeptus Mechanicus, Space Marines, the Necrons, Drukhari, and even T'au and the Tyranid fleets joined the wars amongst the stars.

Battlefleet Gothic: Armada II key art

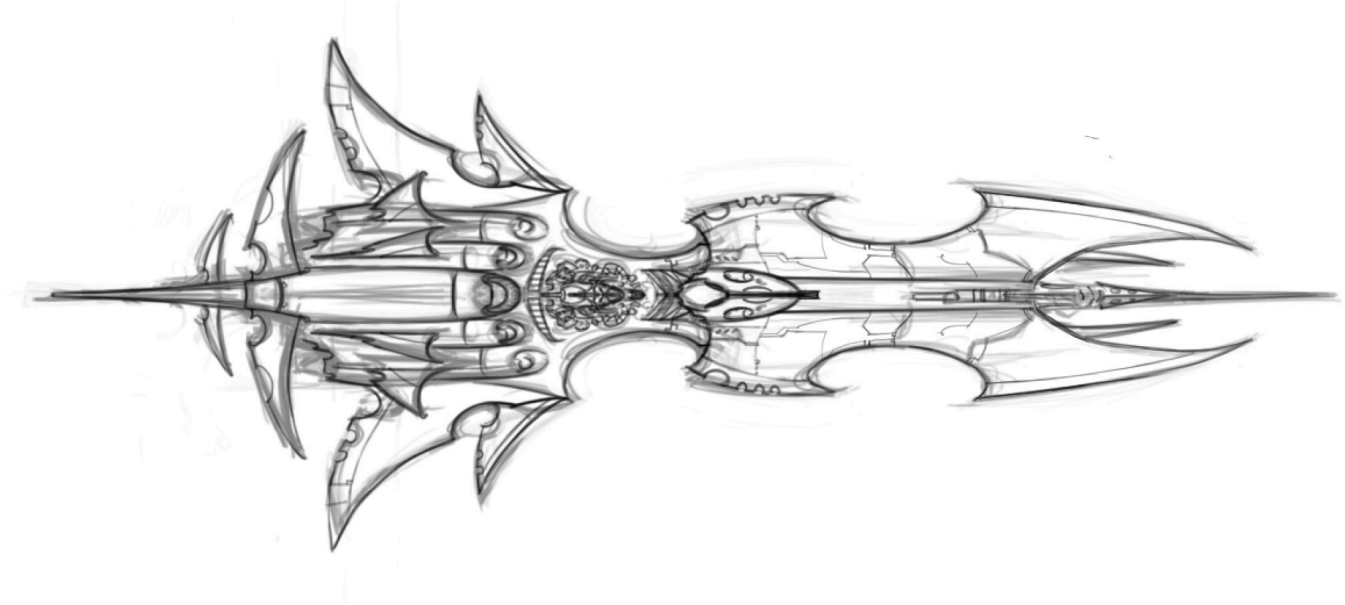
Portraits of an Evil Sunz Boss, a Drukhari Archon, and an Inquisitor



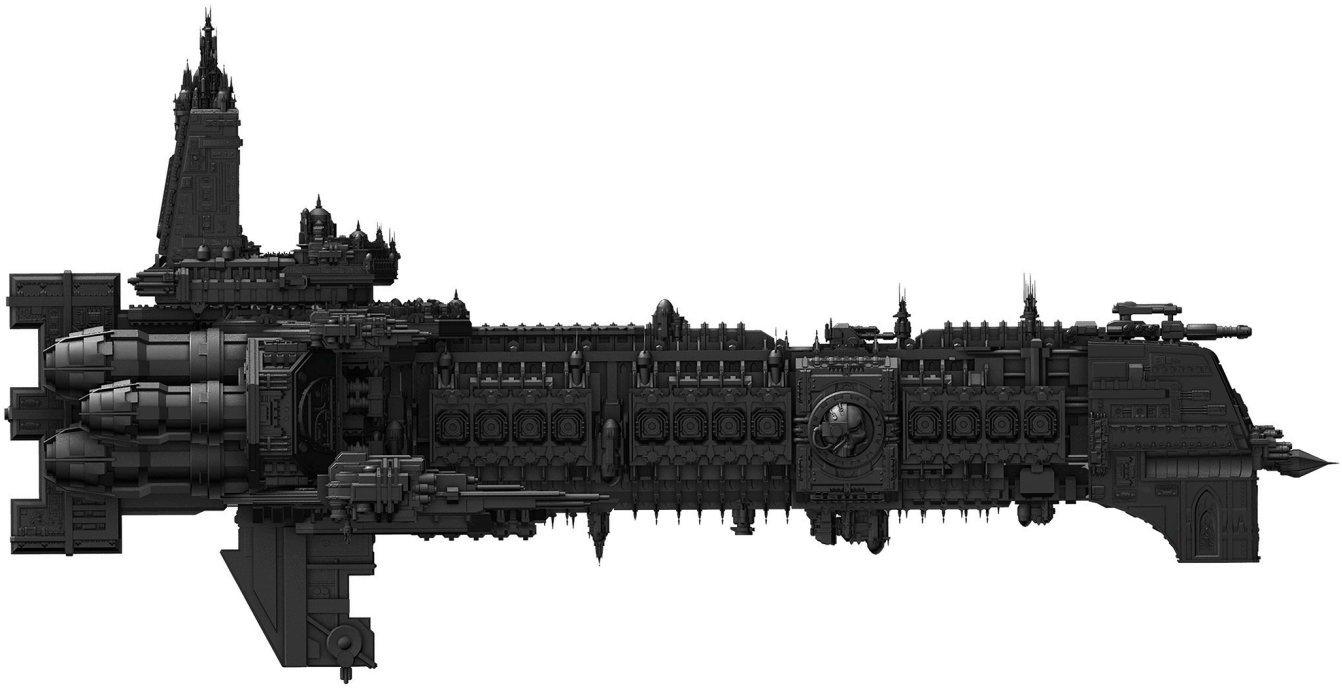
Imperial *Avenger*-class Grand Cruiser



Eldar Dark Cruiser

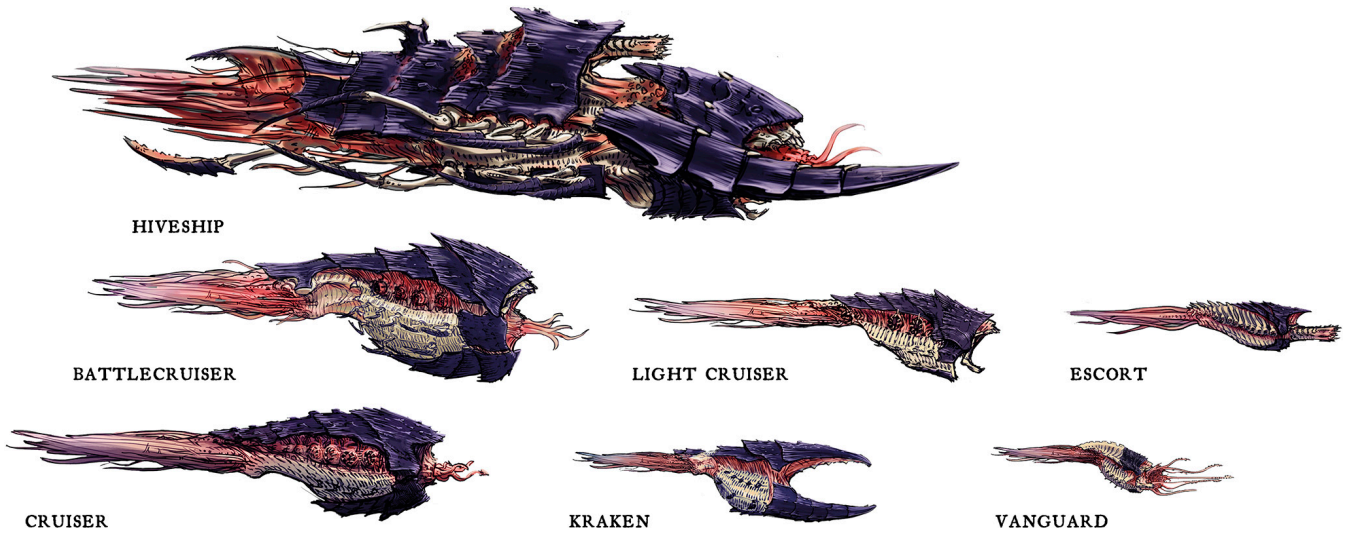


Drukhari Battleship sketch



Ark Mechanicus

Inquisitor Coteaz looks on as the fleets engage



Variety of Tyranid Bioships to scale

"See what has washed up on the Eye of Terror's tides, Admiral Spire. Just as our agents promised... They are even better than I believed."

– WARLORD BRAKTHAST OF THE TRAITOR FLEETS

UPSCALED

There are many sci-fi franchises with humongous spaceships, but in *Warhammer 40,000* the scale of the in-lore vessels is truly vast. Forget crews of 400 or 1000; the capital ships of *Warhammer 40,000* take city-sized populations to function. There are crew that have spent generations in the bowels of the ships, the lower decks being the only neighbourhoods they will ever know. The craft are truly monolithic; for instance, the *Retribution*-class battleship is over 6km in length.

A Slaaneshi champion

Concept art of the starship *Phalanx*

The hull of a Slaaneshi vessel

One of my favourite elements of the *Warhammer 40,000* milieu is the Inquisition. This is the secret police of this era of the Imperium. Agents are assigned with the ultimate purpose to defend Humanity from enemies within and outside. In theory, they answer to no one and even have the authority to doom an entire planet with the Exterminatus order.

In an age of conformity, Inquisitors are as varied in method and personality as the planets they visit in their investigations. While the Inquisition has featured in *Warhammer 40,000* since *Rogue Trader*, it was the *Inquisitor* tabletop game that really delved into what it meant to exceed in the internal politics of the most secretive organisation within the Imperium. *Inquisitor* was played in a different scale using 54mm-scale models, making them twice the size of their *Warhammer 40,000* counterparts. This allowed modellers and artists to really individualise and craft stunning pieces.

Going back to the lore, we also learnt of the schism between the Inquisitors – the puritans and radicals, and even the sub-factions that fight against each other within those divisions. As the game's infamous slogan states, "You have been told the Inquisition is a unified shield against the enemies of Mankind… Everything you have been told is a lie."

There have been a few video games based on this rich stream of characters and conflict. The action role-playing game *Warhammer 40,000: Inquisitor – Martyr* is the most comprehensive and is still active today, with a recent PlayStation 5 edition, despite the original being released all the way back in 2018.

This is a game with a sullen, gothic, and dirty tone, worthy of its subject matter. The game uses a top-down camera and a slightly isometric view, with the emphasis on action. Players choose from four broad categories – a psyker, a crusader, an assassin, and a tech-adept that came with the *Prophecy* expansion.

The game's narrative is a clandestine tale that starts with a ghost ship appearing in the Caligari Sector. This mystery sets off a series of events uncovering secrets and conspiracies as compelling as any Black Library novel, for the Inquisition's agents make excellent, imperfect protagonists.

An Inquisitorial voidship

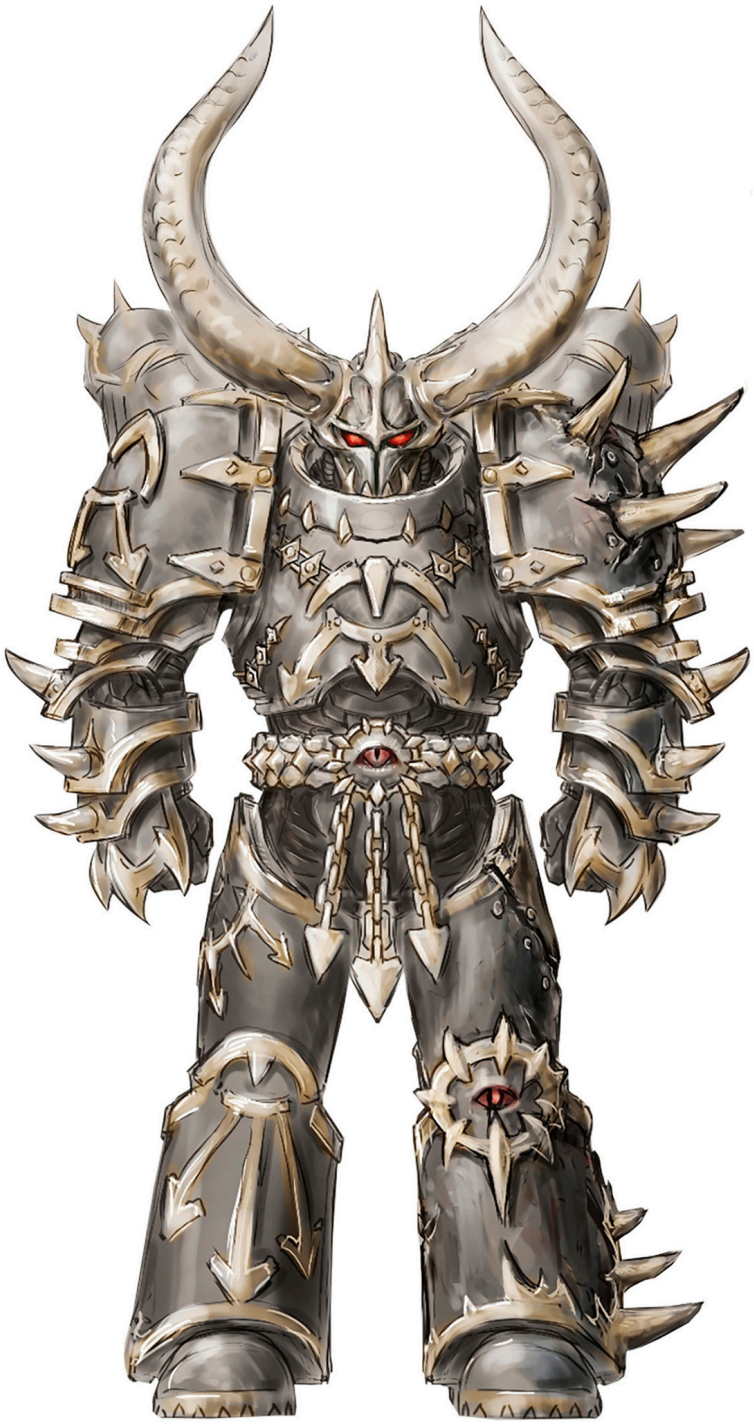
WATCHERS IN THE SHADOWS

The Stormwatchers are the sanctioned blades and Chamber Militant in service to the Inquisitor conclave of the Caligari Sector. While many Space Marine Chapters could be accused of being secretive, the Stormwatchers take this to whole different level. Their existence is a closely guarded secret, such that only a few in the upper echelons of the Caligari conclave know of them. Because of the highly classified nature of their missions for the Inquisition, the Space Marines of this Chapter refer to themselves as the "Watchers in the Shadows".

Chaos Cultists and side-on greyscale render

Stormwatchers Chapter icon variations

Xenos hired gun



Black Legion Chaos Lord Antaroz (concept sketch)

Chaos Spawn artwork

WARHAMMER 40,000 GLADIUS™ RELICS OF WAR

Explore, expand, exploit, and exterminate are the words that define the 4X genre of strategy games. These titles are often turn-based and focus on building an empire, gaining territory, then using your resources and burgeoning technological base, as well as military power, to eliminate rivals and become the dominant force. An example of this genre is the campaign mode in *Total War*.

Warhammer 40,000: Gladius – Relics of War is the *Warhammer 40,000* 4X game. It's a pure strategy title, featuring factions fighting and trying to dominate the planet of Gladius. The Astra Militarum, Space Marines, Orks, and Necrons are the starting factions, but following downloadable content (DLC) added several more forces, including T'au and the Tyranids, making the planet a nexus of alien war-mongering.

As is typical of this category, the graphics are abstract representatives of the armies fighting over the hexagons that make up the planet's surface. Their functionality goes back to the board game roots of the genre and foremost services the gameplay.

Not every game requires verisimilitude or good looks; players can often desire function over form – chess, for example, is the ultimate form of strategic abstraction. The game appears in a nice middle-ground, giving players the trappings of *Warhammer 40,000*, but keeping gameplay at the fore. It's telling of the pedigree of the developers, Proxy Studios and Slitherine Software, that the game goes above and beyond with their graphic fidelity. Key animations bring the markers to life in a way that doesn't detract from the audience's desire to build empires and bring the planet under their control.

T'au fleets leave orbit

Imperial structure

Render of a landspeeder

A Warp storm

T’au strike force deployed

The ultimate cold war is fought in the game *Warhammer 40,000: Mechanicus*. This is a conflict between the Priesthood of Mars, the Adeptus Mechanicus, and a dynasty of the ancient Necrons. Metal versus metal. The arena for this feud is a strategy game: a turn-based, squad-level tactical battler created by Bulwark Studios.

The 41st Millennium is a time of unenlightenment. As is proudly stated in the opening screed of *Warhammer 40,000*'s core rulebook: "Forget the power of technology and science. Forget the promise of progress and advancement." Mankind mostly wallows in ignorance. Yet there is a sect within the Imperium that garners and jealously guards knowledge – the Priesthood of Mars. The cybernetically enhanced Tech-Priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus are the unlikely protagonists of this campaign.

The story is set on the planet Silva Tenebris, a Necron tomb world that is slowly waking its hibernating incumbents. The player takes the role of a high-ranking Magos Dominus Tech-Priest whose explorators are set upon, going deeper and deeper into labyrinthine levels. As the player does this, they can customise their maniples (plural form for the tech-clergy), modifying individual Tech-Priests with different weapons and instruments. The deeper into the planet's catacombs they go, the more powerful the xenos-forms they meet.

The Mechanicus is a fascinating and distinctive part of the *Warhammer 40,000* setting that has rarely been fleshed out (and I deliberately use the term "flesh" here, as it's so abhorrent to the Tech-Priests) in digital form. It's one of *Warhammer*'s most baroque and gothic concepts, mixing the fervent religious zealots with the workings of machinery and technology. The Tech-Priests themselves do not always know how things work, but they believe that dogmatic and ritualistic procedure will wake the machine spirits that lie within the cogs and binharic cant or hexamathic code, often known as the Lingua-technis. Practitioners of these languages, the Cant Mechanicus, must adhere to strict tenets, but there are those whose need for knowledge or whose willingness to turn from the Omnissiah will drive them to abandon such safeguards and drift into tech-heresy.

Such Hereteks are the third faction featured in *Warhammer 40,000: Mechanicus* and were introduced in the *Heretek* DLC. In this DLC, the game developed and showcased locations that had only existed in the written word thus far, such as the interiors of ships like the *Ark Mechanicus*.

This makes the game a complete package for fans of *Warhammer 40,000*, especially those who collect Adeptus Mechanicus armies. It was such a success that a sequel has been developed where you are also able to play as the Necrons.

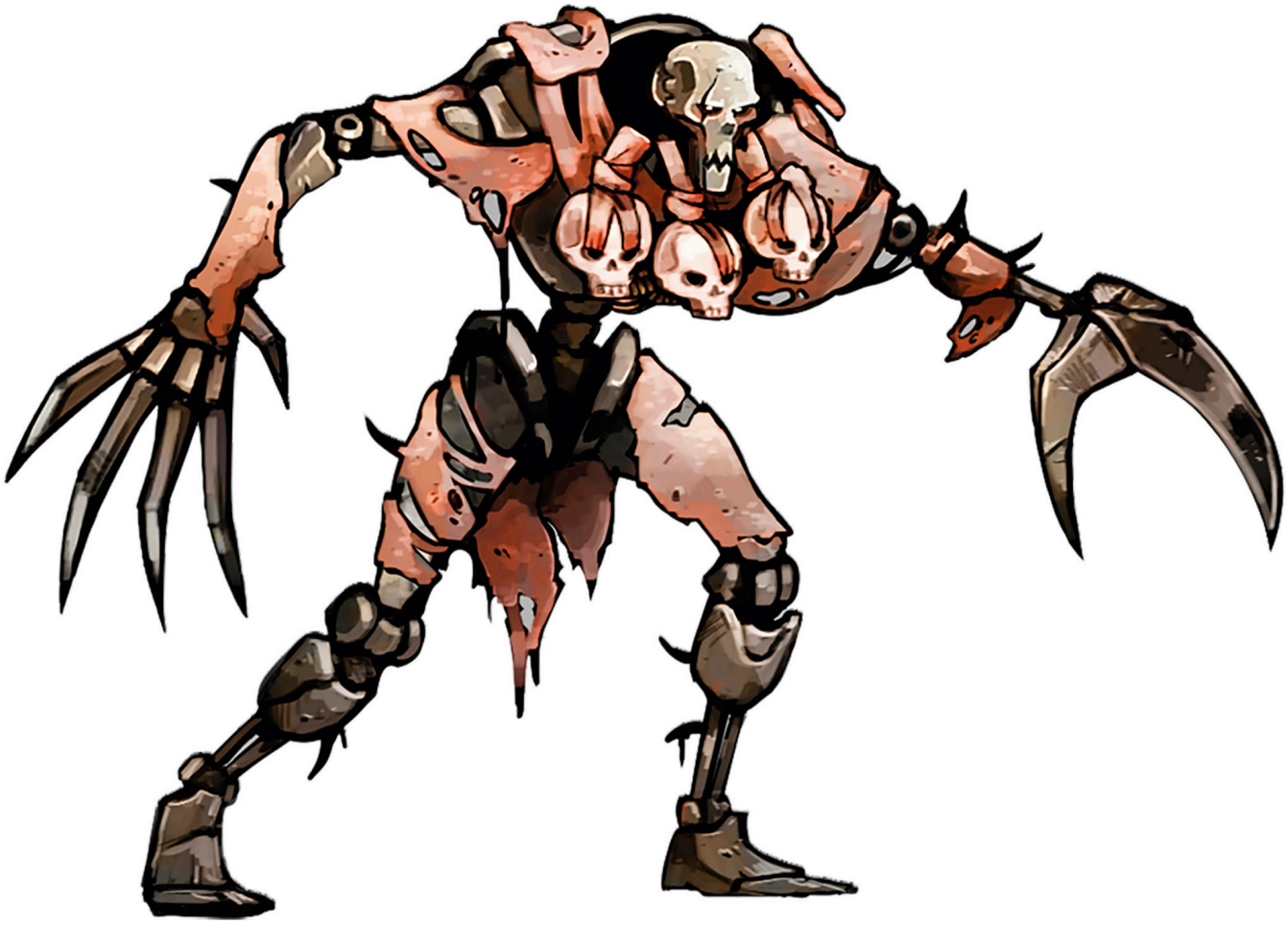
Warhammer 40,000: Mechanicus key art

A Magos Dominus of the Cult Mechanicus

Greyscale Tech-Priests of various disciplines, including a Lexmechanic, Secutor, and Tech-Auxillium

ANCIENT AMONG THE STARS

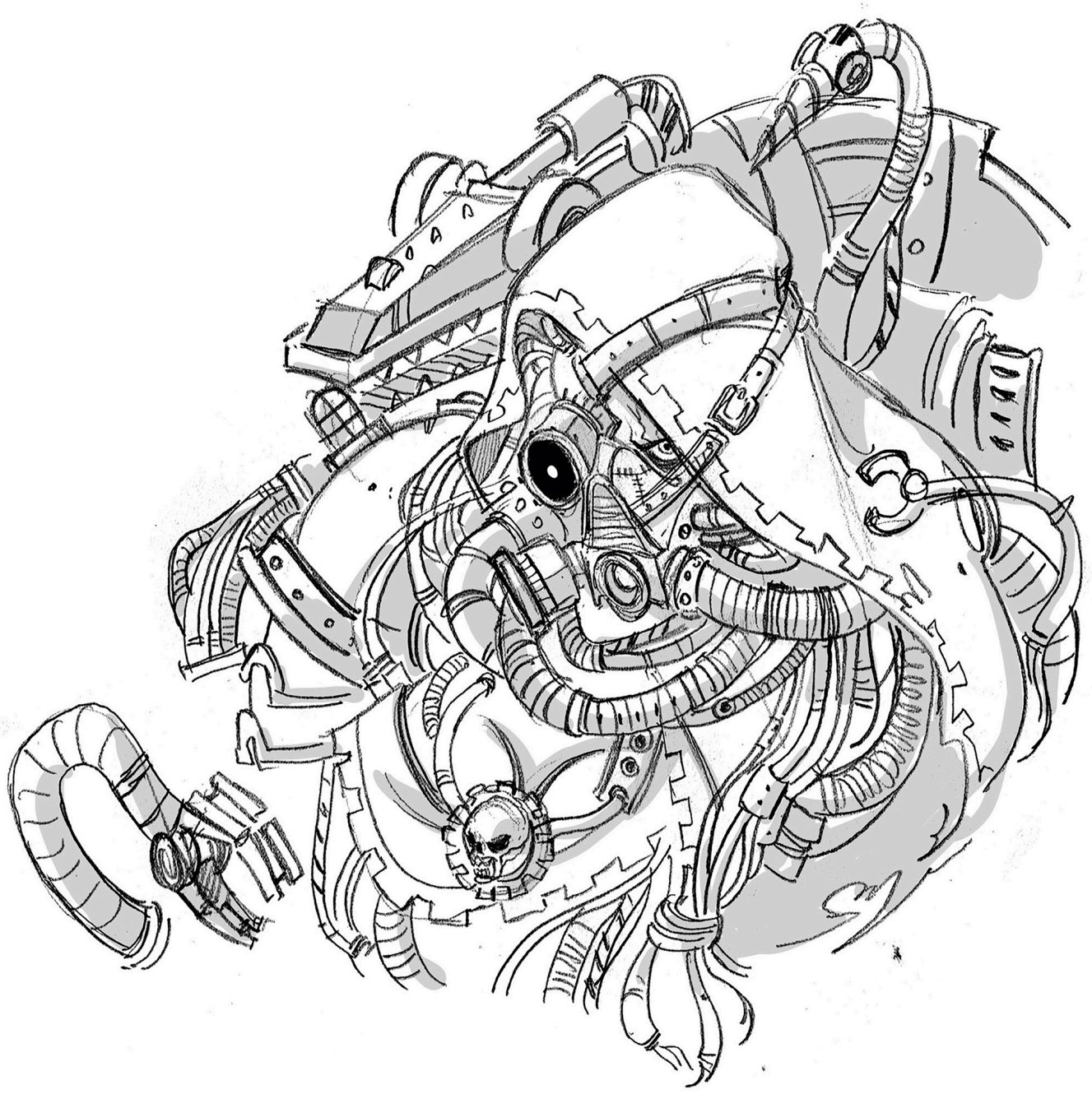
In a setting filled with galactic horrors and powerful factions, none represent true ancient terror as much as the Necrons. Far older than Mankind, and even the Aeldari, the Necrons have awakened from their Great Sleep to find the galaxy infested by younger species considered vermin by their deathless dynasties and the warrior-monarchs who lead them. The Necrons, formed of soulless legions of metal warriors, great technological engines, and commanding overlords, will stop at nothing to see their Infinite Empire restored, and to crush those upstarts who believe themselves rulers of the galaxy. Their advanced technology is a constant source of obsession for members of the Mechanicus, and often (as seen in the game), leads to action-packed battles between the factions that we know and love.



Flayed One

Necron Lord

"I will show you what it means to know fear, and stare your annihilation in the eye."
– OVERLORD SZAREGON



Portrait of Tech-Acquisitor Scaevola

"They will mine this world for its data until there is nothing left to learn. For good or ill, these secrets of the Necrons are ours, and the Adeptus Mechanicus will be changed forever."
– REPORTS AUTHORED BY SCRIVENER VIDEX

THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

The prime gospel of all in the Priesthood of Mars is the Quest for Knowledge. This tenet is pursued through scientific and exploratory labours. Yet, it is not through innovation that knowledge should be attained, and such invention is shunned. The Mechanicus believes that all knowledge already exists and that it should be found, recovered, returned to the Omnissiah via the forge worlds throughout the Imperium, and brought back to Mars – the first and greatest of the Machine God's domains.

Progression of Tech-Priests

Mechanicus Icon

Portraits of Tech-Priests

Multiple angles of a Kataphron render

Warhammer 40,000: Mechanicus key art

As a writer, I should spend a bulk of my time reading, and I used to plough through a book a month. But recently something else has invaded my precious reading time. I made the "mistake" of downloading the new *Warhammer Combat Cards* app onto my iPad, and I have been hooked ever since.

Combat Cards first appeared on the shelves in 1989. It was noticed that card deck games with cool art or photos were proliferating in newsagents and it was thought Citadel Miniatures would easily work as the subject matter. Thus, *Combat Cards* was created, proving to be a big hit. The cards came in six decks: Dwarfs, Goblinoids, Warriors, Monsters, Chaos, and "Spacewar" (the *Rogue Trader* card deck). It's very illuminating that a deck of cards consisting of just Dwarfs had equal parity to the entire *Warhammer 40,000* range back in 1989!

There have been various new editions of *Combat Cards* over the years: a second edition in the mid-1990s, one in the noughties, and the most recent version of the physical cards released in 2017.

Enter the developers at Well Played Games, who have created the modern digital version of *Combat Cards*. This game, like the original, still uses images of expertly painted Citadel Miniatures. With the digital medium, it may have been tempting for the developers to use 3D renders or animated art, but that would have missed the essence of what *Combat Cards* are and have always been – a way to showcase the miniatures that are at the core of the *Warhammer* hobby, and to see them at their best, painted by (in my opinion) the finest painters of Citadel Miniatures in the world.

That doesn't mean the game is a mere gallery; the cards are dynamic and pleasing to the eye. They speed across the screen to slap opposing cards, often wreathed in auras, while shooting bolter fire or summoning psychic powers at enemies. The gameplay is addictive, as it was back in the '80s and '90s, but with more complex mechanics at work to compare with rival card battlers. It's compelling and fun, but I need to get back to reading!

Marneus Calgar combat card

23
105
Magos Dominus Ivasnophon
Adeptus Mechanicus Tech-Priest Dominus
10
10

30
115
Obsidius Mallex
Chaos Lord
10
18

Cards for Magos Dominus Ivasnophon and Obsidius Mallex

A spread of a selection of cards

“Be top dog, the big boss man… Not just a prole labouring away… toiling for House, Hive and Throne…”

There are many hive worlds in the Imperium, but Necromunda is perhaps one of the most infamous. Its capital, Hive Primus, is a bustling, continent-sized termite mound teeming with Humanity in its many corrupt forms: from the noble houses that live in the spire, to the guilders and industrial houses that labour in hive city below. Even in the lower levels of the underhive, house-sponsored gangs fight in a continual war for whatever meagre wealth and power they can squeeze out of that urban hellscape.

In *Necromunda: Hired Gun*, the player takes the role of a bounty hunter thrust into internecine war, but will they be a tool of the forces at play, or can they emerge as top dog? The game is a first-person action shooter set deep in the underhive of Hive Primus. The developers, Streum on Studio, were veterans of portraying the 41st Millennium, having previously produced *Space Hulk: Deathwing,* in which they created lauded environments.

Here, too, the environments of the hive are deliciously baroque and a fundamental character of the game in their own right: fiery orange furnace chambers, multi-leveled factorums strewn with bridges over chemical vats, and corpse-starch processing plants.

The characters are equally memorable, and the player’s avatar – the titular Hired Gun – can take many forms. Your fellow bounty hunters also have eclectic designs, for in the underhive, you’re not dealing with armies, soldiers, those in uniform, or even the armour of the same group.

One of the aforementioned bounty hunters the player encounters is Kal Jerico, an infamous opportunist who first appeared in the *Warhammer Monthly* comic back in the early 2000s, and who has been loitering around Necromunda ever since. And yet, if you ask the players who have experienced and enjoyed the game, there is one hero that stands out – the cyber-mutt, the Hired Gun’s faithful hound. It enjoys chewing through gangers as much as players will shooting them – perhaps it is the game’s top dog after all?

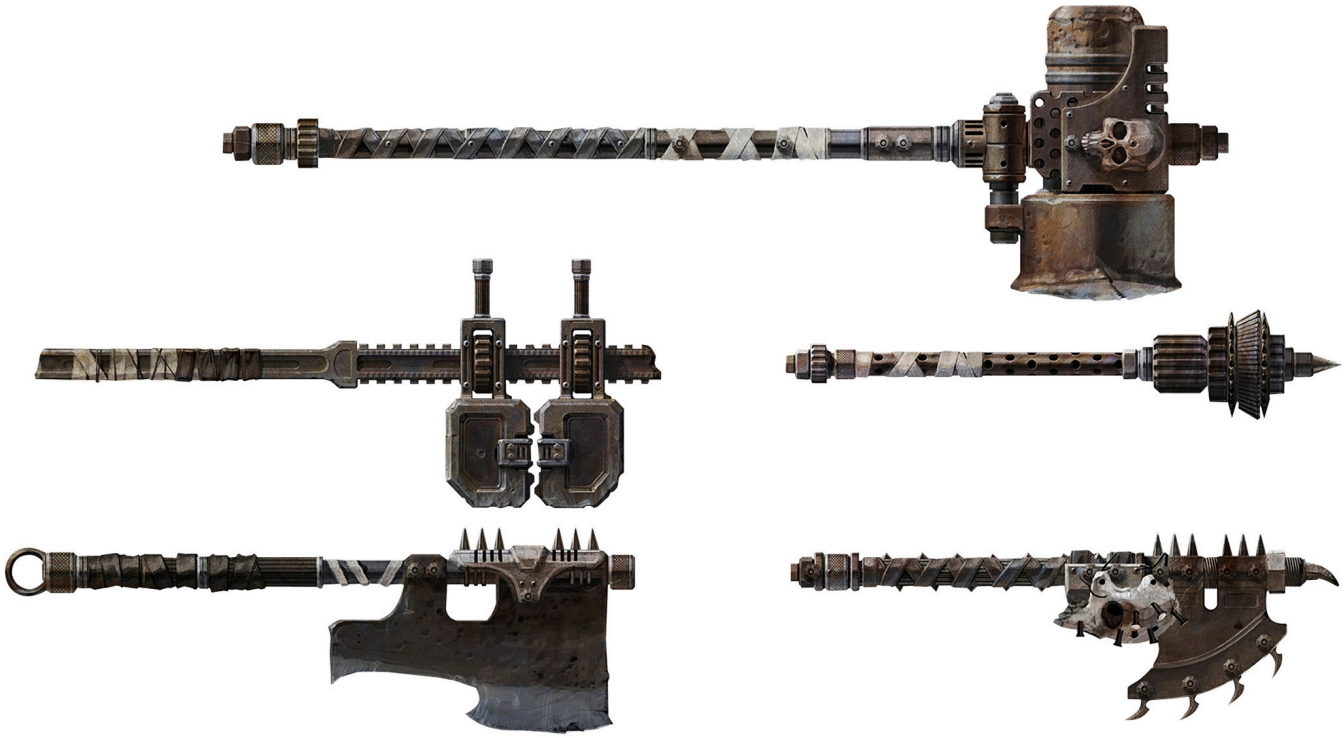
A Hired Gun and cyber-mastiff stalk the Underhive from *Necromunda: Hired Gun*

JERICO'S WAY

Hive Primus's most infamous resident is Kal Jerico, a roguish bounty hunter. Kal has an interesting pedigree – he is the son of Planetary Governor Helmawr and Inquisitor Heleana Jerico. Kal Jerico left his life of luxury, found a companion known as Scabs, and soon found work as a mercenary and hired gun, whose legendary cunning has kept him alive thus far.

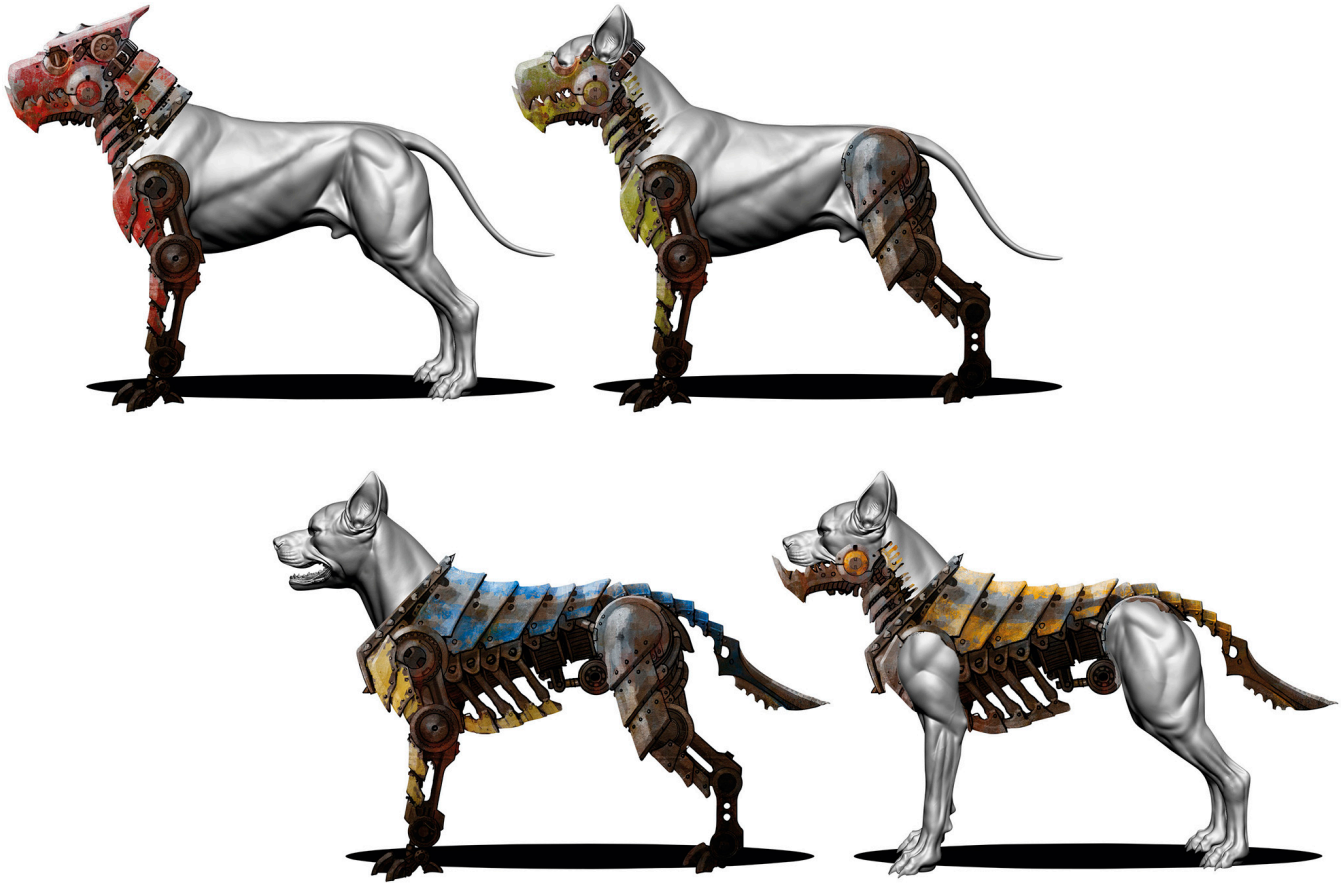
A House Escher ganger

Goliath Boss



Goliath Gang two-hand, heavy, and light melee weapons

Kal Jerico concept art



Combinations of mastiff augmentations

Hired Gun's left and right arms

"No one kills a guilder unless they are truly dangerous or truly desperate. And the truly desperate are the most dangerous of all. That's why I think we can help each other out..."

– KAL JERICO, BOUNTY HUNTER

Warhammer 40,000: Battlesector is a polished experience, a true battle simulator that comes the closest so far to the source tabletop game. We're not dealing with squad-level tactics here, nor are we marshalling fleets in the void of space. These are battles with approximately 10-25 units – a simulacrum of a *Warhammer 40,000* fan's miniature force for fighting on the tabletop.

The game is turn-based, allowing the player to set up long-term tactics. Overwatch plays a key role, encouraging players to set up traps, ambushes, and kill zones. Facing is important, as enemies can hit vulnerable flanks if they are not covered by supporting units. Additionally, HQ units get two actions, double the normal amount, giving them a key function in the army, who are able to turn the tide with their impressive stats.

The developers at Black Lab Games have also made an attractive game, taking the models as depicted in *White Dwarf* battle reports and animating them across the arid landscape of Baal Secundus, while the presentation between battles has an archaic feel, with storytelling that uses a calligraphic and parchment style. It's a narrative worthy of such framing; as mentioned, we're playing on Baal's moon, in the home system of the Blood Angels. In what would become known, rather ominously, as the "Devastation of Baal", the Tyranids of Hive Fleet Leviathan strike from under the galactic disc. The Indomitus Crusade arrives at the height of the invasion to stave off the the Tyranids and bring the Primaris knowledge and technologies to the Chapters of the Sanguinary Brotherhood. Thus, the Blood Angels are resurgent and ready to purge the aliens from Baal's moon in a 20-mission single-player campaign.

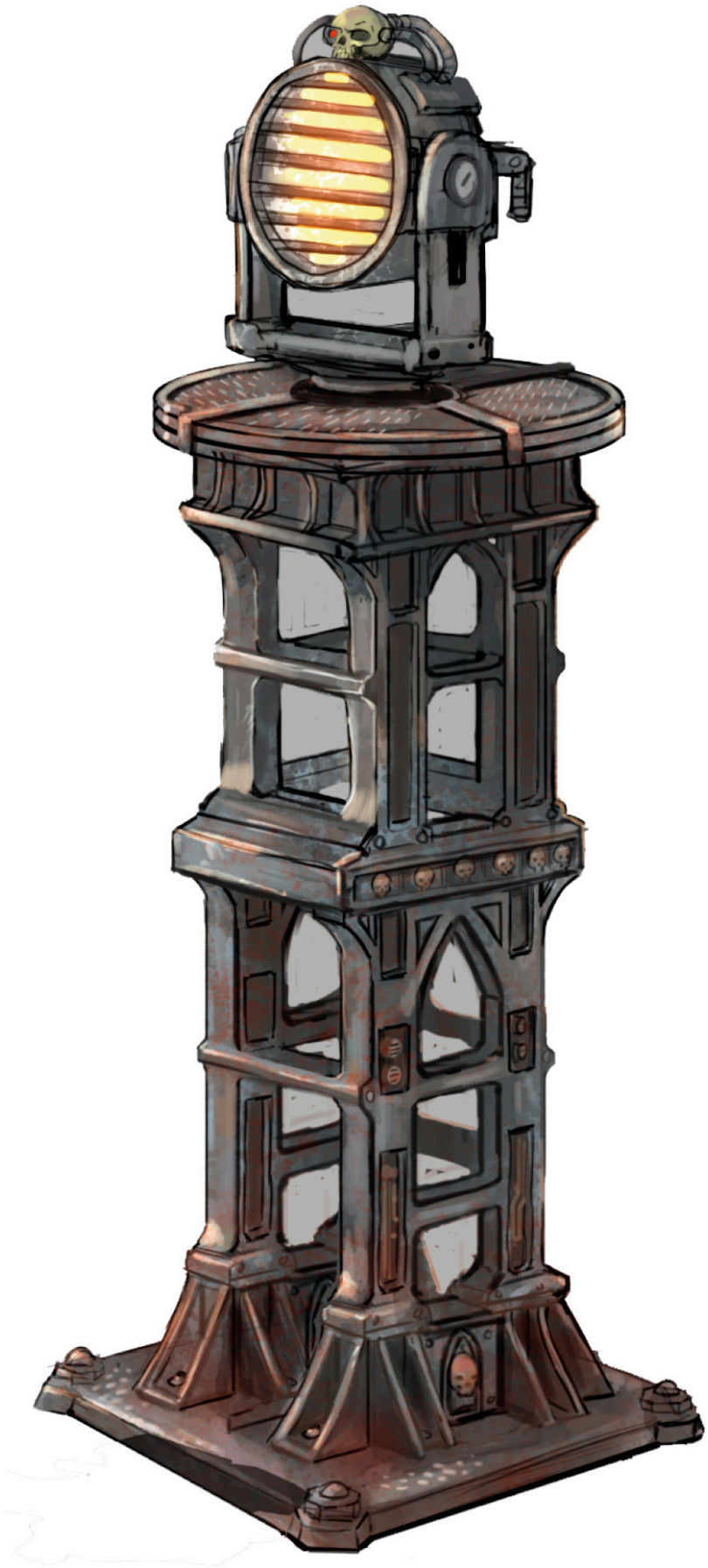
Blood Angel Librarian faces down Winged Hive Tyrant

ASTROPATHIC ARCHITECTURE

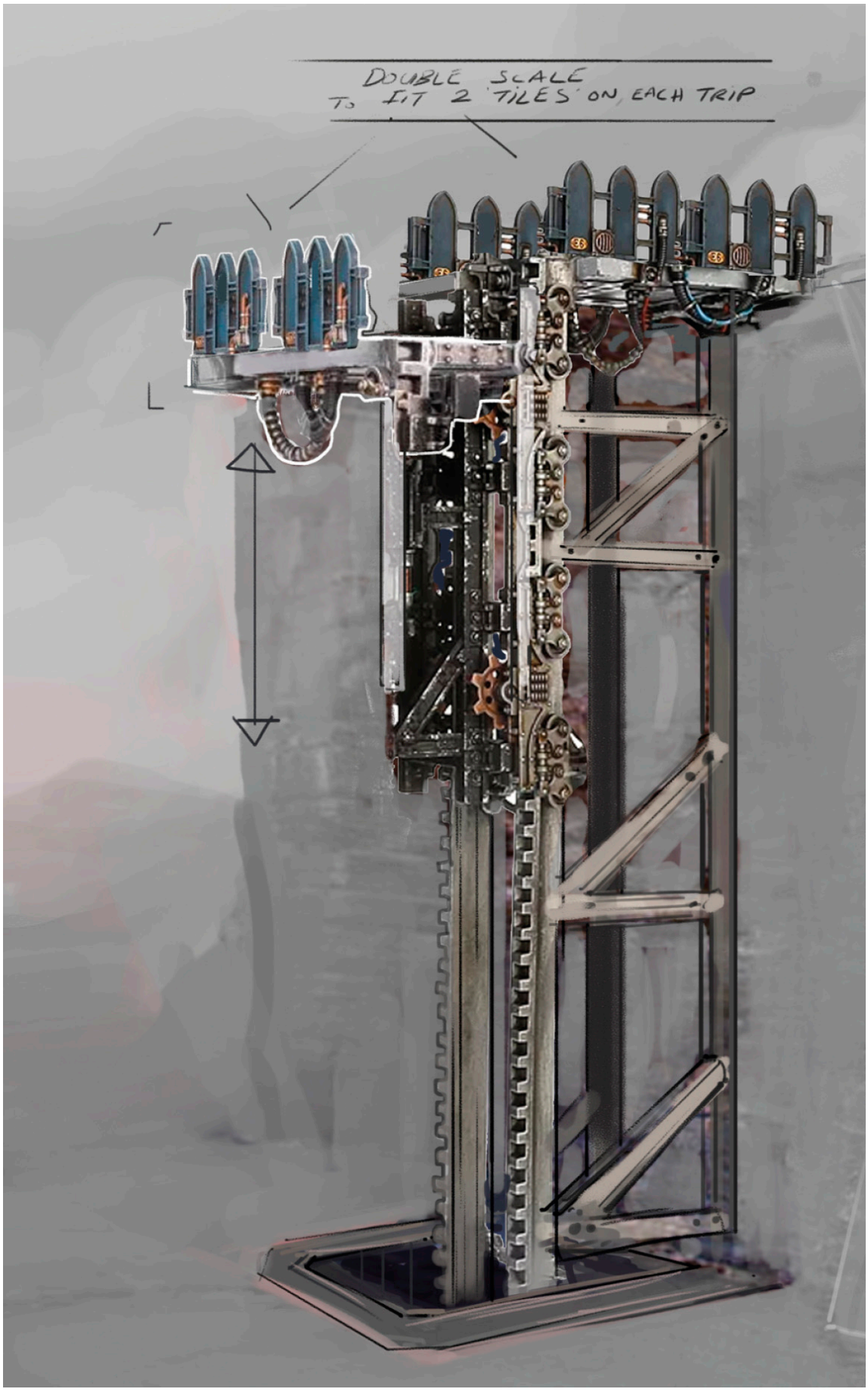
Video games will often showcase places that are known to exist in the world of *Warhammer 40,000*, but haven't yet been depicted. It is then up to the studio making the game to be the first to visualise the setting, buildings, and ship interiors, with heavy guidance from Games Workshop. This is usually done in the form of a concept sketch or drawing that is then sent to *Warhammer*'s artists and writers for their notes and feedback. This is then refined over several iterations until there is an accord.

The Astropathic Station to the right is one such example. It is known there are urban and ground-based astropathic buildings, but a visualisation of one hadn't been required until this game.

Ghostkeel Battlesuit render



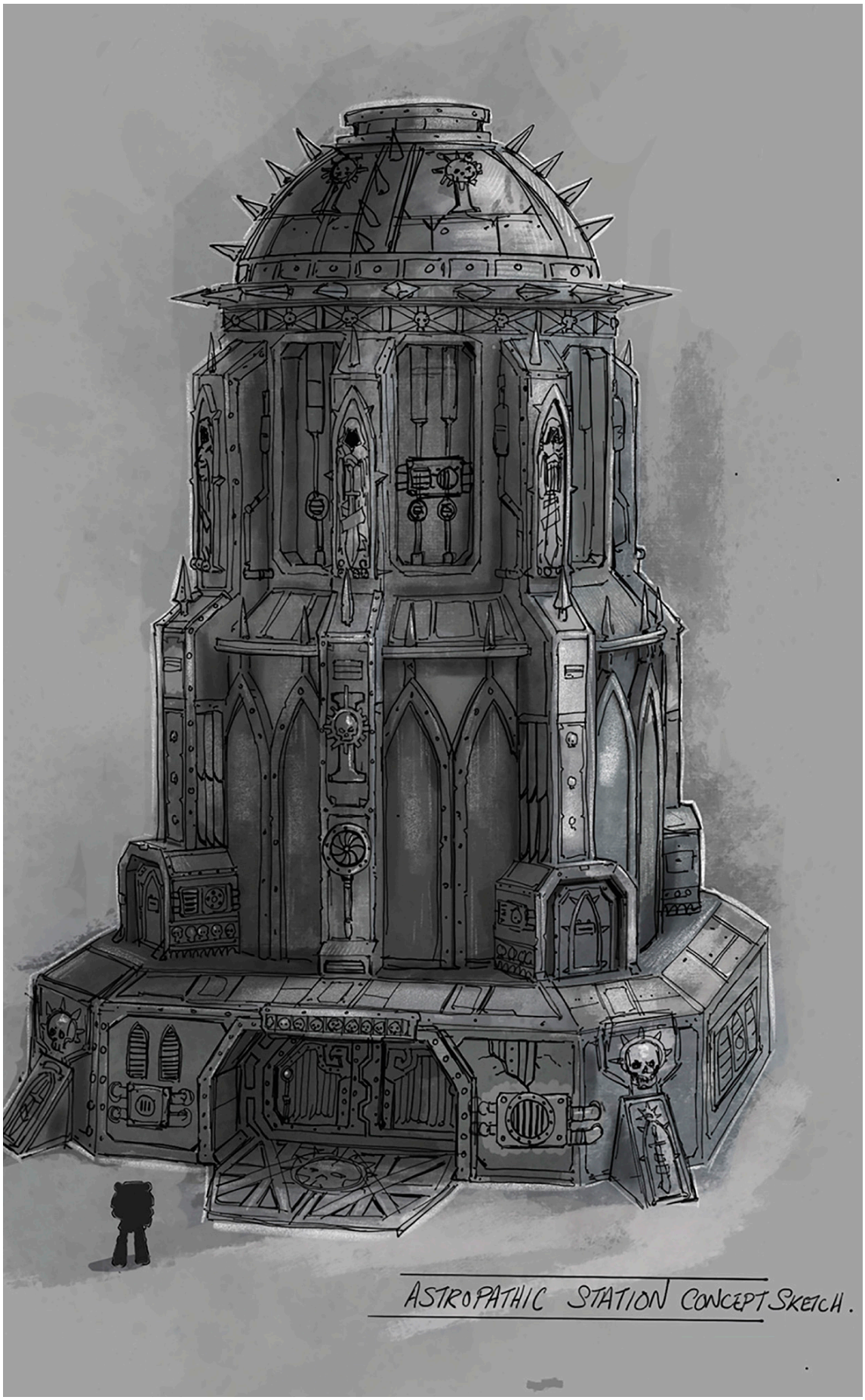
Servo spotlight tower


DOUBLE SCALE
TO FIT 2 'TILES' ON EACH TRIP

Elevator fragdrill sketch

The T'au Empire sends its forces

A render of a Blood Angel Intercessor



ASTROPATHIC STATION CONCEPT SKETCH.

Concept art of Astropathic Station

"Time flows in contradictions since the invasion as an unexpected slowness in the aftermath of an impossible victory. A languid sweetness of air tasted by the hapless victor, and yet I also feel the turning of change."

– SERGEANT CARLEON OF THE BLOOD ANGELS

Many games in these pages are about immersion and fidelity, a simulation of the thesis the game is putting the player in, whether that is as an Ork in a cell-shaded world of teef and shootas, a general marshalling armies, or an admiral ordering fleet manoeuvres of great voidships. However, *Warhammer 40,000: Tacticus* has a different take. This is a game that uses abstraction, putting *Warhammer 40,000*'s most iconic characters at the forefront and having them battle rival foes over a hex-grid battle arena.

This fits the game's genre – a mobile-battler – well. It's true that games of this type can be rather hit-and-miss, often more focused on gacha mechanics to keep the player hooked. However, *Warhammer 40,000: Tacticus* falls into the hit column, as the core gameplay is genuinely compelling, allowing the player to use a wide range of character abilities and weaponry to pull in, outflank, or outgun the enemy. Victory allows the player to gather more currencies and expand their character roster, putting a wider variety of forces at their disposal.

The campaigns are where this game really flourishes, though; at the time of writing, there are four core campaigns to play, namely "*Indomitus*," "*The Fall of Cadia,*""*Octarius*," and "*Saim-Hann*," followed by the more difficult mirror versions.

No matter the campaign you play, the game looks incredible. The distinctive, bright art style shows yet again that even for a game set in a grimdark future, the visuals do not have to be grim or dark or depressing. What is really fun is seeing these famous *Warhammer 40,000* celebrities and large creatures depicted in the *Warhammer 40,000: Tacticus* style. Even personalities as sombre as Marneus Calgar or the Blood Angels Chief Librarian Mephiston are great reveals when portrayed in the game's signature look.

In the years since the game's launch, it has accumulated a thriving player community, who are looking forward to future *Warhammer 40,000: Tacticus* campaigns.

Mephiston leads a Blood Angels battleforce against the Tyranids

LINES DRAWN

The art style below is sometimes known within the industry as line art. Typically the subject is drawn in a 2D view from multiple angles. Often, as shown here with the Avatar of Khaine, appendages are removed for side or rear views to give 3D artists unobscured views of a creature's back or flank. This is done soon after, or as part of, the concept stage, allowing artists and model makers to comprehend the scale of the figure. Weapons are often placed on the same sheet at the same angles, for clarity. Often these types of assets are also used for approval documentation.

The Ultramarines and Battle Sister composition featuring Marneus Calgar and Saint Celestine

Lieutenant Titus in *Warhammer 40,000: Tacticus* form, front and back

Line art exploration of an Avatar of Khaine

PANOPLY

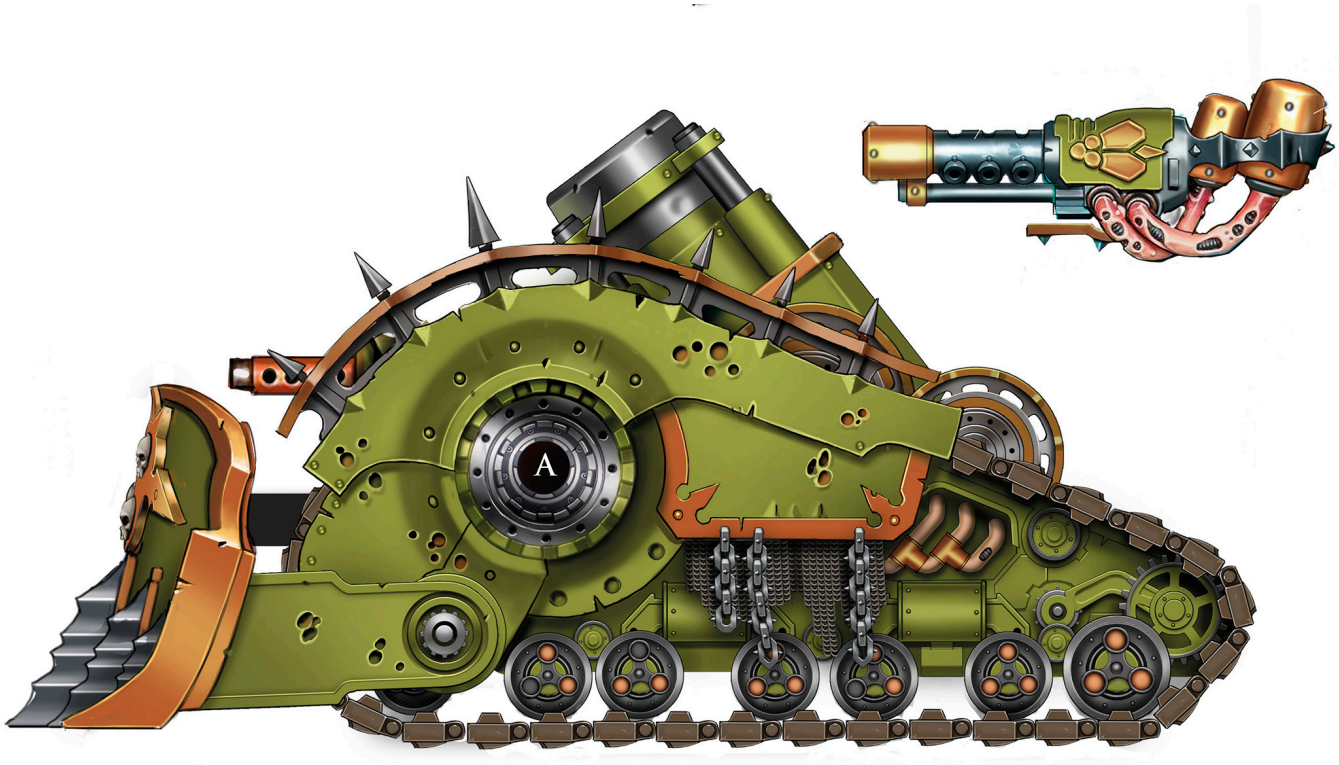
At the time of writing, *Warhammer 40,000:Tacticus* is one of the most comprehensive games representing the vast panoply of powers in the *Warhammer 40,000* galaxy. While most games in the 41st Millennium will focus on two, three, maybe even four factions, *Warhammer 40,000:Tacticus* has a huge, impressive, and ongoing roster, just a few of which can be shown on these pages. There are eighteen factions so far, split in broad coalitions between the Imperium, xenos, and the Dark Gods.

Khârn the Betrayer and World Eaters versus Tyranids

T’au face Orks

Side view of a Tyrant Guard

The Thousand Sons led by Daemon Primarch Magnus the Red



Plagueburst Crawler

Death Guard Champion

An infamous saying in *Warhammer 40,000* is "Forget the promise of progress," and that feeling is apt here. Although this phrase can be framed as a negative, it suits *Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun* to the core. This game is an unapologetic "boomer-shooter", a retro FPS that seems to have been pulled straight from the '90s.

Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun revels in arcade-style pixel art. As a *Warhammer* fan, there is a gleeful joy in seeing pixel versions of Plague Toads, Chaos Space Marines, and even Lords of Change. The environments are also gorgeously rendered in pixelated form. For many who have grown up reading *White Dwarf* magazine, the structures that make up the levels will be familiar; they are clearly inspired by the Games Workshop design studio's scenery collection of that era, as seen in countless articles and battle reports. There is a certain nostalgia hit, as you navigate levels that contain environments that Games Workshop luminaries fought over during that battle report heyday.

Despite its retro credentials, *Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun*'s storyline was very contemporary, bridging the gap between *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine* and *Space Marine II*. The game takes place on the forge world Graia in the aftermath of the Ork invasion that then-Captain Titus was sent to thwart. Chaos ensued and Titus's fate was shrouded in mystery, but an Imperium dispatch liberation fleet cleansed Graia of the Chaos and xenos presence.

Yet, Graia remains a great prize, and Chaos is persistent. A Chaos Sorcerer, Tumulus Samael, invaded a second time, looking to continue the plans first enacted when Titus was present. Once more, the Ultramarines send a potential saviour, Malum Caedo, a Sternguard Veteran, to Graia. These are the events covered by the game. Caedo being a Sternguard was an inspired and deliberate choice. The game is called *Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun,* and the gameplay focuses on shooting this revered weapon and staple of Space Marines. The Sternguard Veterans in particular excel at boltgun use and are able to wield the many different patterns and specialist bolt ammunition. All this makes for a frantic shooter that any '90s kid would have loved to have played back in the day and now still can!

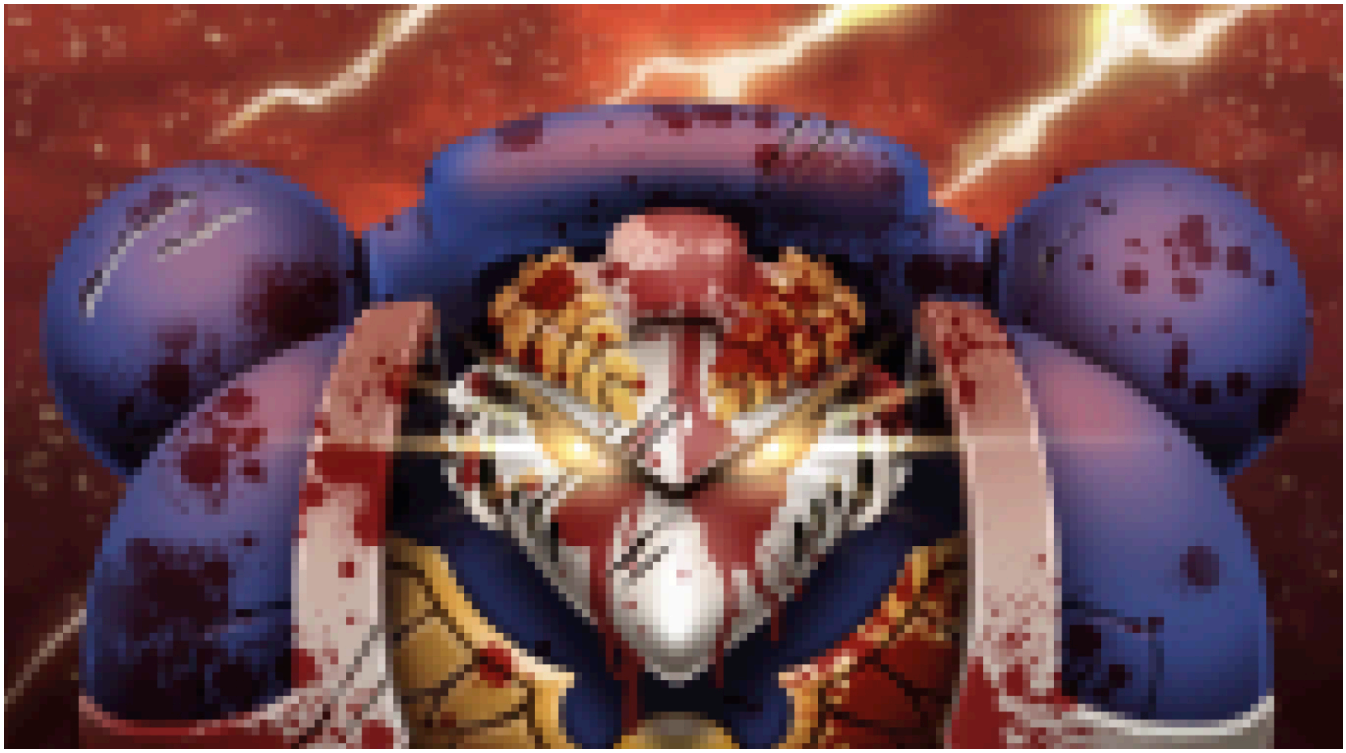
Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun key art

WHY SO STERN?

In *Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun* you play an Ultramarine Sternguard Veteran Sergeant voiced by Rahul Kohli. When a Space Marine reaches a level of veterancy, he is inducted into the 1st Company. From there he may end up in the Chapter Terminator Squads, or as a Sternguard Veteran.

Sternguard Veterans are ranged specialists, able to wield their boltguns with such deadly accuracy, even other Space Marines may look clumsy in comparison. They usually have access to an array of special bolter rounds and will always customise their own beloved bolters to a condition that newer novitiates of the Chapter would not be sanctioned. Yet, while they excel at using a bolter, place any Imperial firearm in a Sternguard's hands and watch their enemies die, for they are masters at all forms of ranged weaponry.

Boltgun from FPS perspective

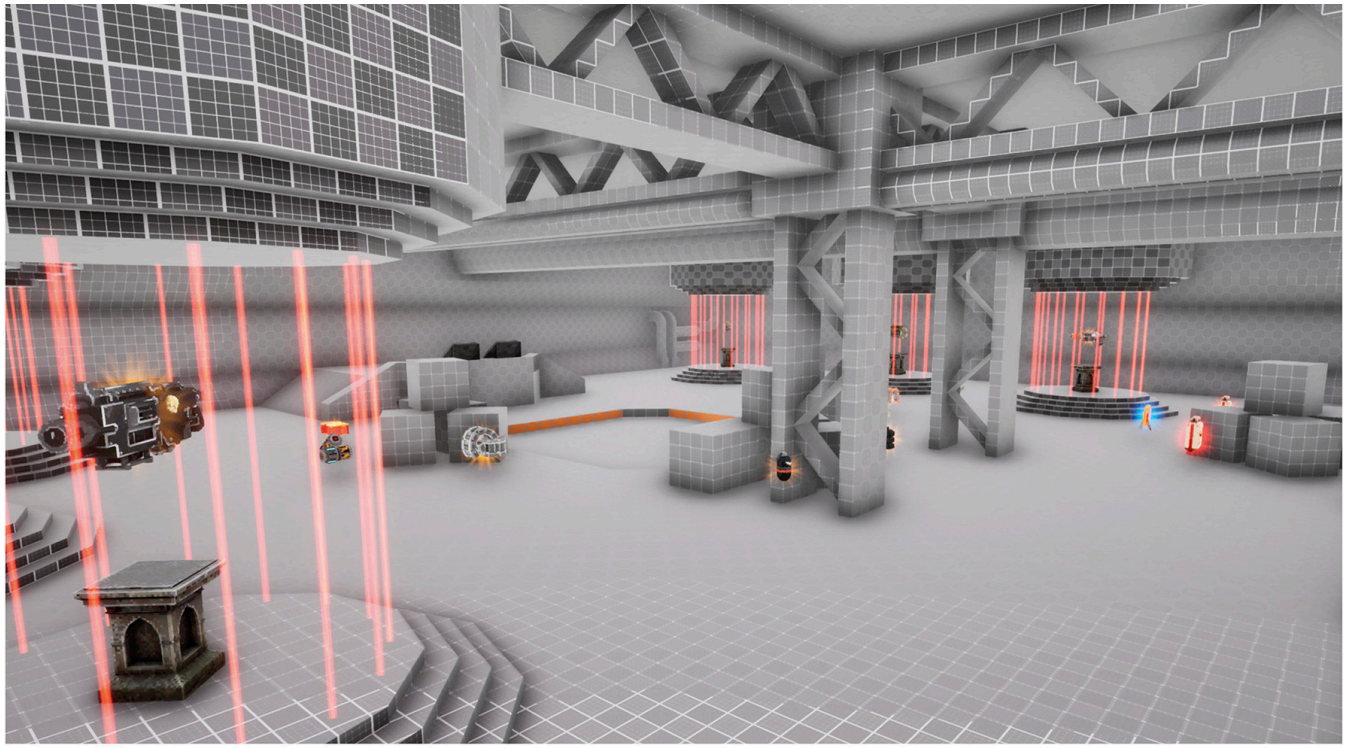


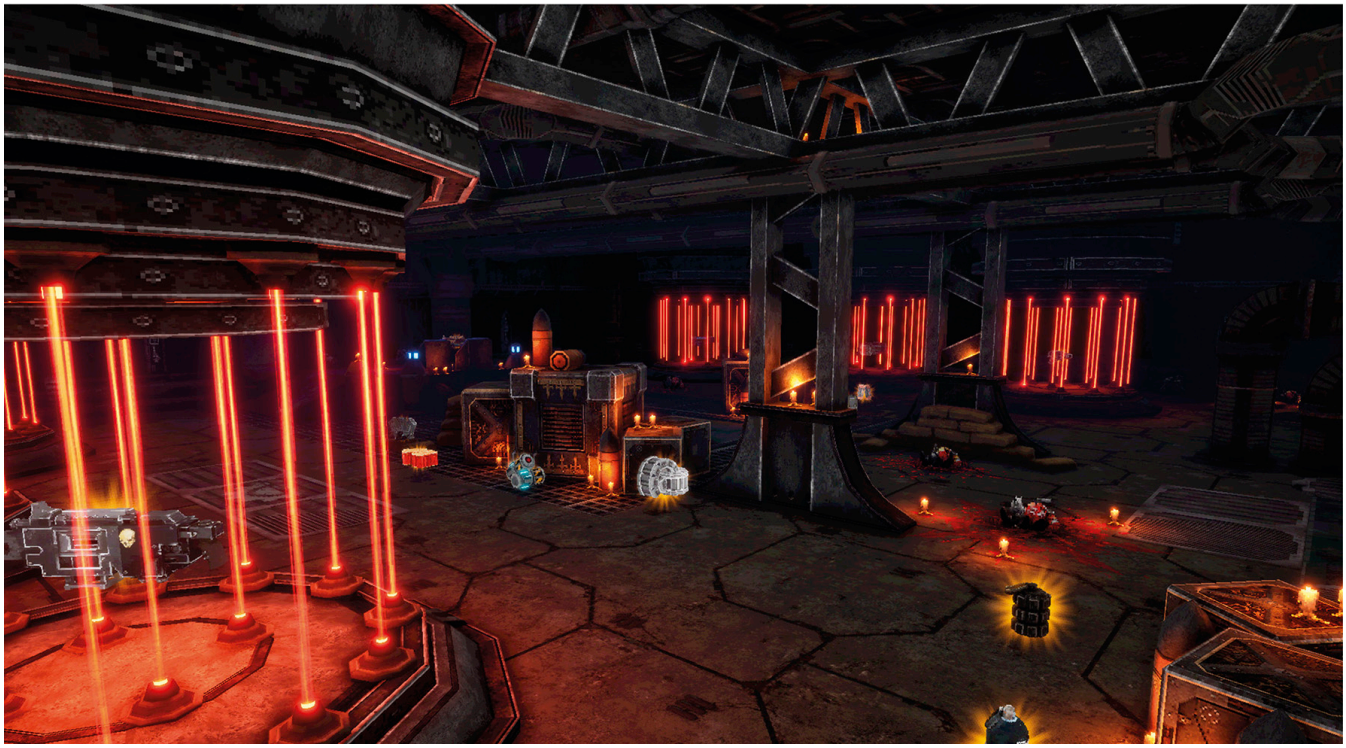
Sternguard with eye lenses lit

Brother-Sergeant Malum Caedo, Sternguard Veteran

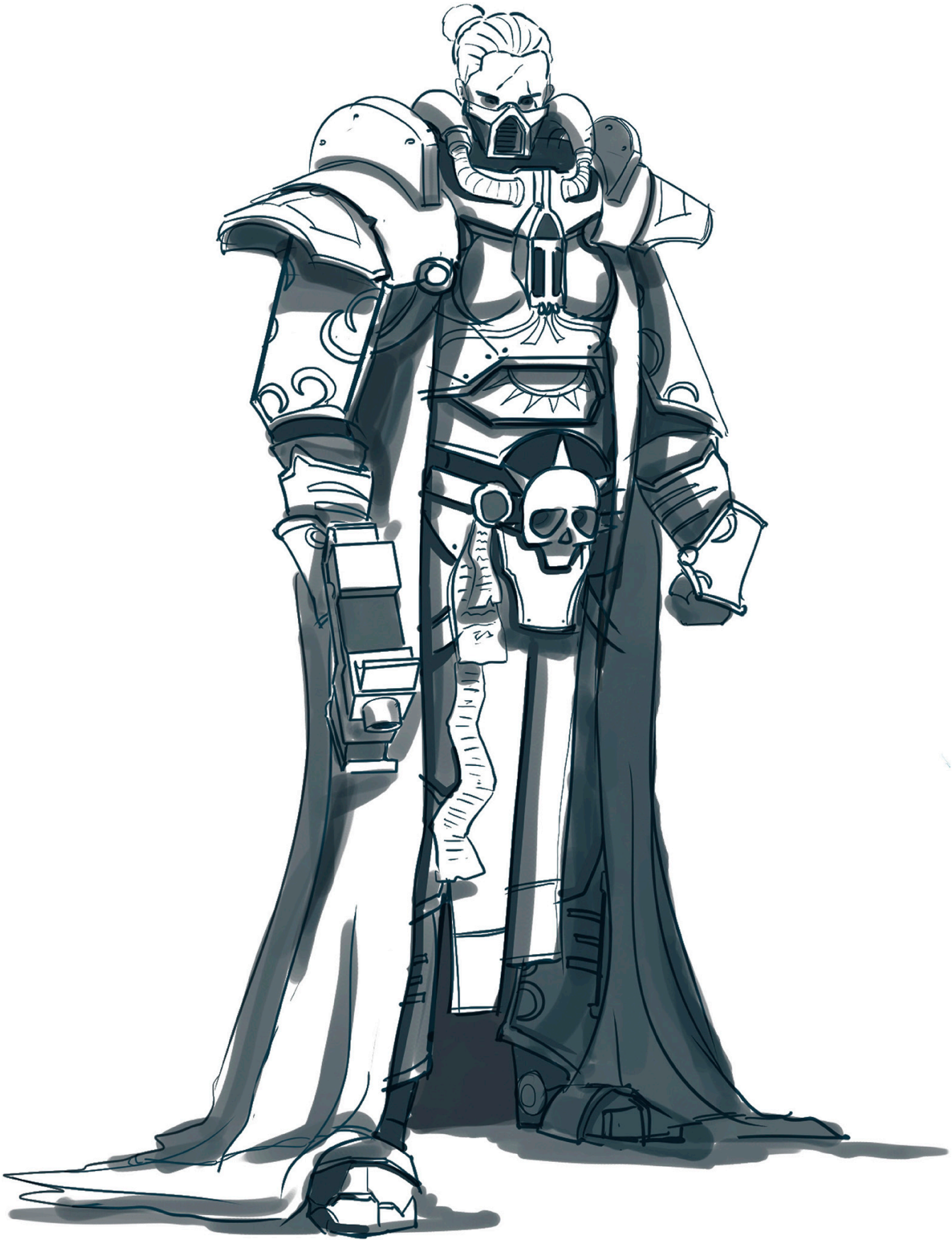
BOX READY

Level designers will often use untextured blocks, terrain, or furniture for placement and to construct their levels. This is sometimes known as white boxing or grey boxing, but studios may well have their own colloquial term. In any case, creating a pre-visualisation of the level, arena, or battlefield helps with iterating and early playtesting to ensure a good player experience.





Level design showing grey boxing and final environment



Inquisitor Seibel concept art

The various states of righteous slaughter

"Beg your dark gods for mercy. I have none!"

– STERNGUARD VETERAN SERGEANT MALUM CAEDO

STORY TIME

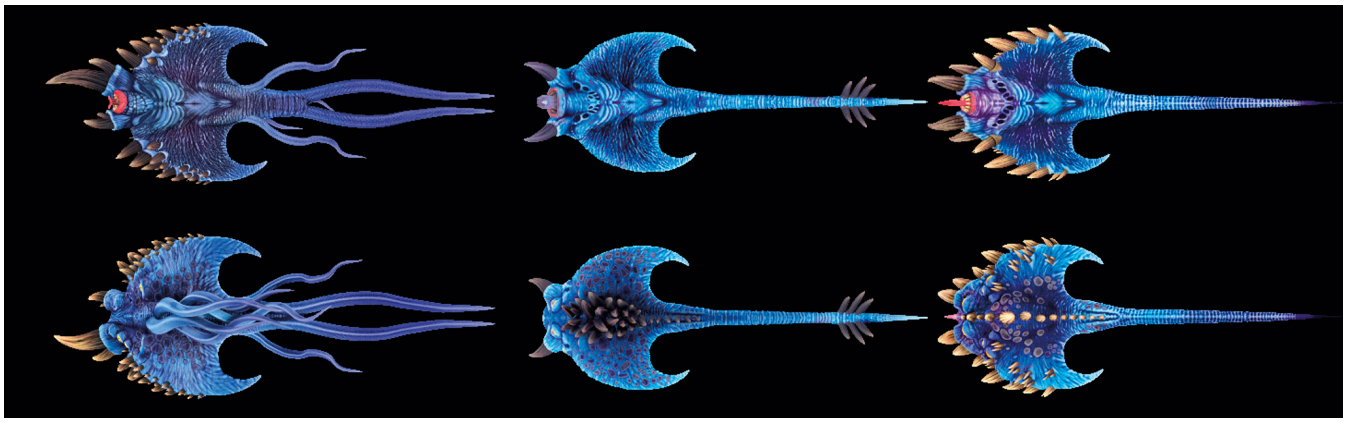
For those of us brought up on Commodore Amigas, Atari STs, or early '90s PC gaming rigs, the story elements and presentation of *Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun* are a pure nostalgia hit. The pixel graphics and simple animations seem to come straight from an Amiga disc; I can almost hear the sound it makes in the drive as it accesses the required data to make the animations and sound play…

The story itself is layered. We visit the forge world Graia once more in search of the mysterious power source discovered by then-Captain Titus, that the Ruinous Powers are keen to get their corrupted hands on.

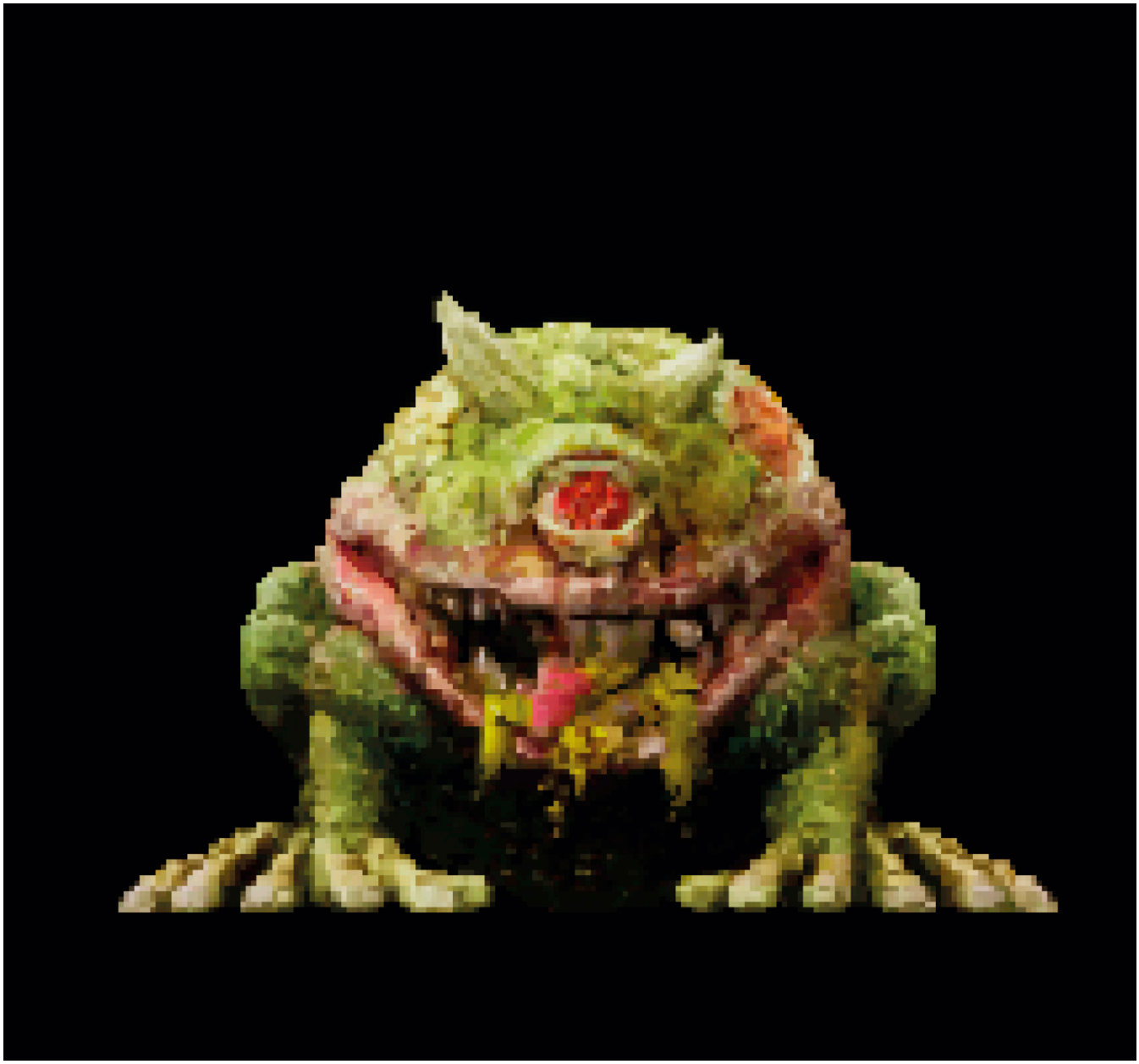
Chaos Terminators

Chaos Space Marines

A Great Unclean One in T-pose



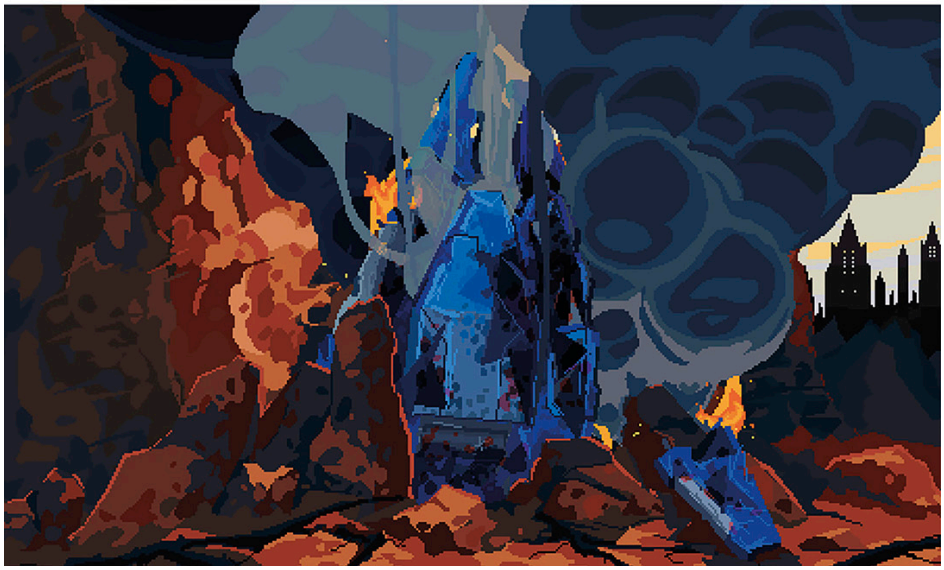
Screamer variations



A lesser Plague Toad

Exalted Pink Horror

Flamers of Tzeentch



A selection of images from *Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun* cutscenes

Inquisitor cutscene image

Sternguard corpse image

Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun saving icon

Owlcat Games has a pedigree for computer role-playing games (cRPGs). These are projects that, while digital in nature, still retain the mechanics and systems used in a traditional tabletop role-playing game over the skill-based systems more familiar in console-based video games.

Owlcat's previous titles had used an isometric view often typical of this genre of games, and *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader* was no different. The grimdark *Warhammer 40,000* feeling was present in both the view and the game's distinctive UI.

Yet, what really made this game stand out was the protagonist – that you were playing a Rogue Trader. *Warhammer 40,000* is a galaxy of countless souls, but for the vast majority of the Imperium, existence is drudgery and survival. Those who do make war and encounter exotic alien species are locked into certain roles, be it an admiral in the Imperial Navy, a Castellan in the Astra Militarum, or even a Space Marine Intercessor. Rogue Traders are the closest possible thing to free agents in the 41st Millennium. Operating as explorers, ambassadors, and merchant lords, they are given exceptional liberties that no other Imperial citizen – perhaps save an Inquisitor – could contemplate. Bearers of sacred and generational Warrants of Trade, they are allowed to build up their own mercantile interests and even private armies under the purview of the Imperium.

This makes them ideal role-playing game characters; they are filled with a lust to be profligate, a hazy moral code, and a general lack of supervision that any other agent of the Imperium could never imagine. The *Rogue Trader* game delves into these characteristics with a fantastic moral system that can change the fortunes of fate depending on how the player's character reacts to situations. This is shown through three possible states: "Dogmatic" – striving as a loyal servant of the Imperium, "Iconoclastic" – a more relativistic approach that considers practices that could be deemed radical by the Imperium, and "Heretical" – falling towards the Ruinous Powers. In a far-future regime where dogma must be followed, compromise can actually be the extreme position…

Key art for *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader*

Stub revolver tiers

Player portrait of female noble Rogue Trader, an Astra Militarum male, and criminal female

Power Armour Artisan concept

Concept art of a decadent female noble

Haemonculus artwork

Neutral male Rogue Trader

"The sole thing that your kind is good for, mon-keigh, is your ability to suffer. I have long been surfeited with physical pain – your kin provide it in abundance from the cages in Commorragh. The pain of the soul, on the other hand...is a rare delight."

– MARAZHAI, DRACON OF THE KABAL OF THE REAVING TEMPEST

COMPANIONABLE COMPANIONS

As with many role-playing games, the strength of your party is the key to your success. Choosing the right companions in your ongoing adventure can have dramatic consequences. *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader* has a true gallery of characters from across the setting, allowing you to interact with personalities you will rarely see in a codex army list. There is an Imperial Navy officer, an unsanctioned psyker, a Magos Explorator, a navigator from the Navis Nobilite, an Aeldari Ranger, a Battle Sister, a rival Rogue Trader, an Interrogator, a Space Wolf, and even a Dracon of the Drukhari.

Male psyker

Idira Tlass, an unsanctioned psyker

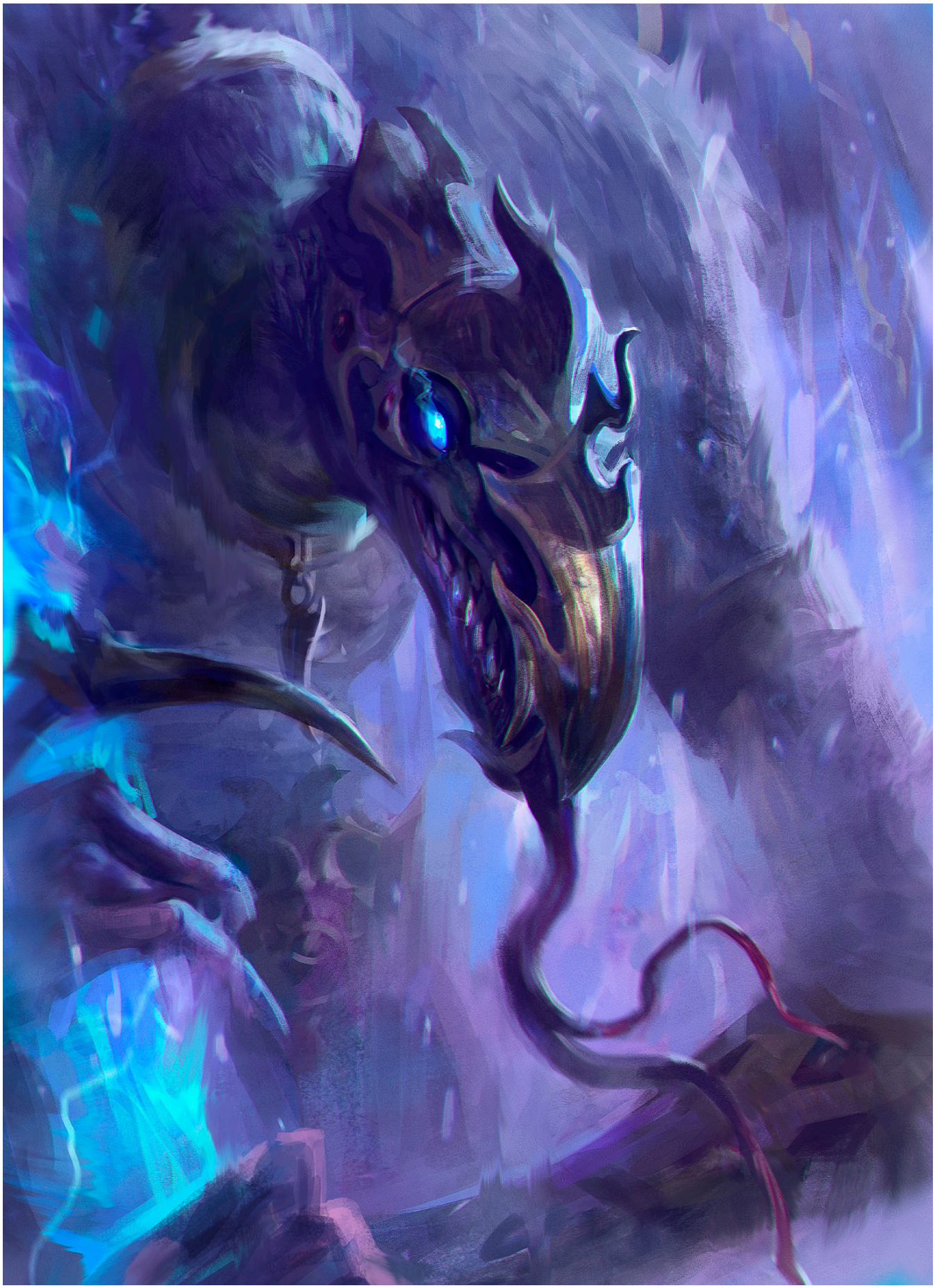
Solitaire

Ulfar, Space Wolf companion

THE LORD OF LIES

The Chaos God of fate, sorcery, intrigue, and change is the one known as Tzeentch, also called the Changer of the Ways. Its mightiest servants are the greater daemons, the Lords of Change. These powerful masters of manipulation are often the final bosses in *Warhammer* video games, and – spoilers! – they certainly make their presence known in *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader*. As well as being powerful spell-crafters, able to manifest Warp powers at will, they also excel at twisting the minds of mortals. Every syllable they utter is a lie built on a half-truth, layered upon a fountain of falsehoods, each word designed to sway and convince. With *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader*'s morality system, more than in any other game, the Lord of Change is the perfect opposition.

Lord of Change left hand detail



Lord of Change artwork

Lord of Change head close-up and hand articulation details

We've already covered many great-looking games, but by Slaanesh, *Warhammer 40,000:Warpforge* is lavish! The gorgeous art of the cards is closely matched by the arenas – the "game boards" that the player takes their deck to fight in. This is a card-battler that is big on impact and clad in the grimdark trappings all *Warhammer 40,000* fans love, stealing their attention before they can turn back to their paintbrushes or Black Library novels.

Despite being a card game, the game has a 3D presence. The cards do not lie flat against the arena floor, but stand proud; positioning is important, as the game's unique ranged-attack mechanic has an effect. The soundscape is equally impressive; characters will talk to the player, often taunting and perhaps baiting them to play a card too soon and waste an ability.

As you expect, the faction decks all have their own broad playstyles that can be further modified by how the player builds their own deck. The Orks, for instance, are a horde deck but with a large selection of support cards that can buff and enhance the mobs until ready to unleash on the enemy. While the Chaos Absolute deck has a good mixture of high health, melee cards, and some good synergies with the Dark Pact ability. It's got a few flying cards and vanguard units for attacking on the flank, meaning the cards adjacent to the target can be attacked.

The game is still early in its life cycle, but it has already released a formidable array of factions and cards. The Ultramarines 2nd Company, Sautekh Dynasty, the Goffs, and Saim-Hann Aeldari are just a few, with more packs and boosters to come.

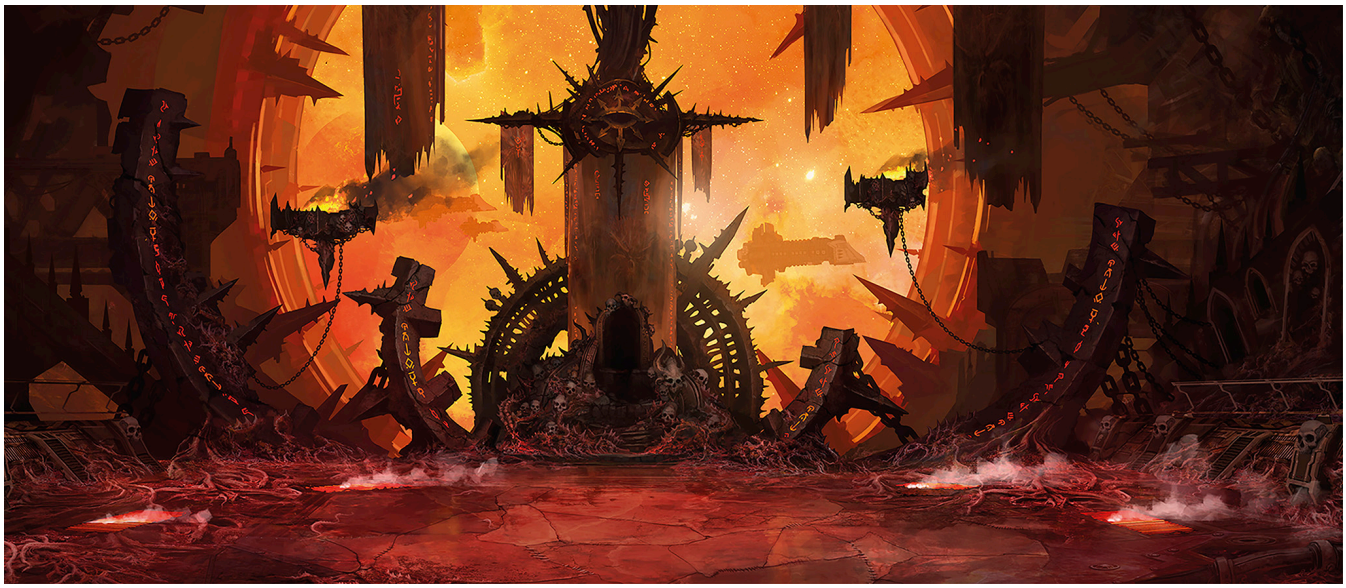
Warhammer works so well for card games, as there are so many different factions, troops, and characters for a developer to feature on the cards. This is an exciting prospect for the players, the end-users, as well as the people making the game. There is a lot of inspiration for the forge of the game to run hot and keep the cards coming.

Key art for *Warhammer 40,000: Warpforge*

Swarmlord

Ethereal Supreme Aun'Va

Avatar of Khaine



Warmaster's Arena

DARK ANGELS

Dark Angels

Jain Zar

Tramplasquig

Imperium landing pad arena

Portraits of Titus and a Squig

"The doom that devoured our people... She Who Thirsts will never be sated, no matter how many other souls you feed to her."

– JAIN ZAR

Warhammer 40,000's grimdark aesthetic pervades many *Warhammer* games. Flip the pages of this book, and the baroque gothic dread of the far future will be easy to spot. So when a game like *Warhammer 40,000: Shootas, Blood & Teef* comes along, it does stand out from the crowd. This run-and-gun sideways-scrolling shooter is truly a unique and addictive take on the 41st Millennium.

As you'll have guessed from the title, the player takes on the role of an Ork. There are four different types of Boy the player can select: a Beast Snagga, with exploding Squigs; a Weirdboy, who excels at shocking and stunning the enemies, perfect for crowd control; a Flash Git who brings more dakka and fancy burna bombs to the mix; and finally, a Stormboy who likes to get all close and personable, and also throw the occasional klusta bomb into the mix.

Adding in a clan type from the usual selection of Bad Moons, Deathskulls, Evil Sunz, and Goffs further customises the character to give the player a great choice of Orky git.

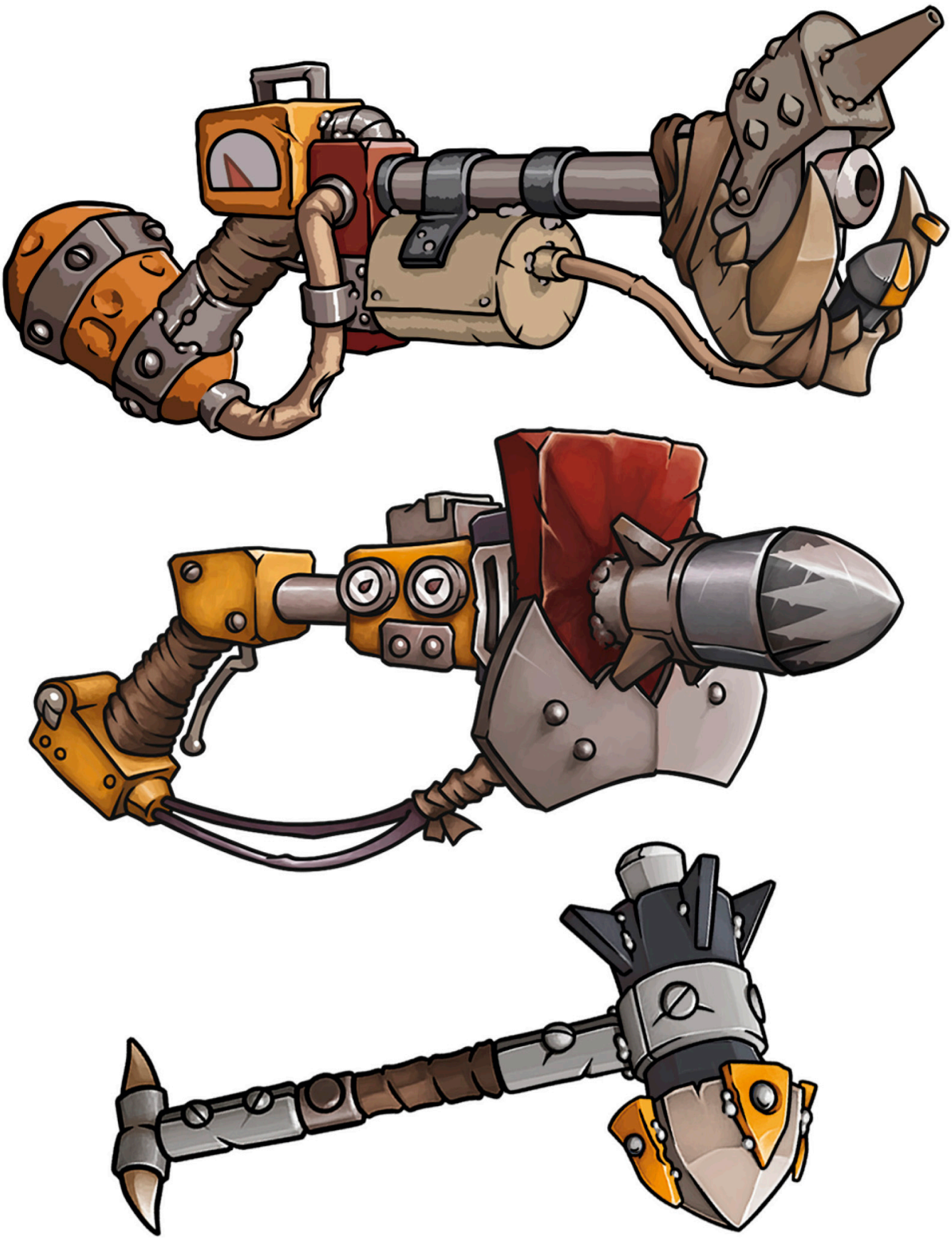
While playing as an Oddboy lets you spend your teef and build your Waaagh!, the game also provides an interesting new perspective. The Imperium is the primary foe here; bosses include Space Marine, a commissar in a Baneblade, and even an Imperial Knight. All these enemies are rendered in a comedic art style. The aforementioned Knight will have to walk nimbly, and the Imperium's tanks zoom about left to right like the enemies of a '90s side scroller. It's all very clunky, cool, and krumpinly typical of an Orky game. So bring the dakka and some extra ladz, as *Warhammer 40,000: Shootas, Blood & Teef* is a multiplayer, and there's nothing more fun than killing humies together!

Da Boyz ready ta fight!

Ratling

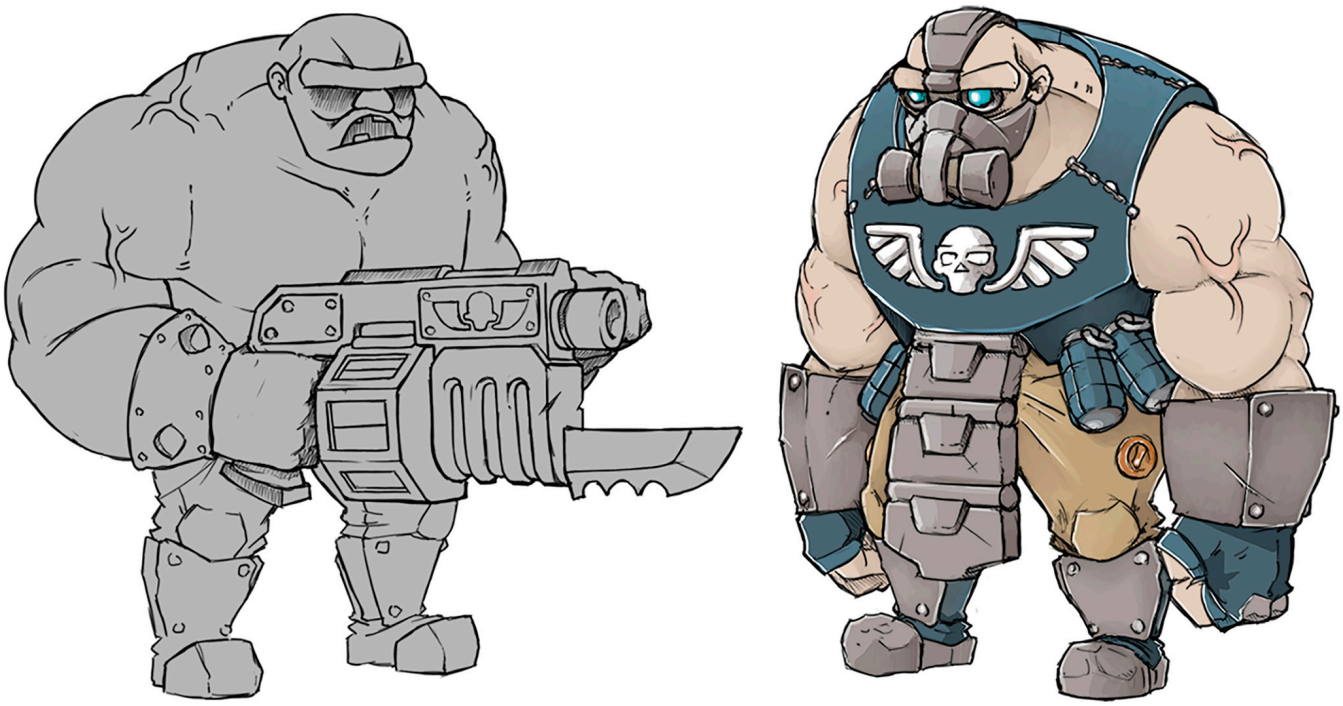
Grenade launcher

Commissar



Selection of Ork weapons

Ork from Da Boyz group



Ogryn designs

In late 2011, the crack team of Toronto-based games developers at Relic Entertainment released *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine* onto a world eager to experience the grim darkness of the far future. While Relic's *Dawn of War* series had been a smash hit on PC, console gamers were yet to witness the 41st Millennium in its full glory.

Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine would answer players' needs, and then some. Arriving on gaming consoles with the tagline "I am War", the game did not dither on its core pillar of bringing *Warhammer 40,000* to the masses. It's here that players are first introduced to Captain Demetrian Titus of the Ultramarines, and yes, I said captain. That's not a mistake, as the character would be demoted to lieutenant by the time the sequel arrived a decade later.

Captain Titus leads a small three-battle-brother squad to the forge world Graia, initially fighting rampaging Orks. However, with the Inquisition involved, events (unsurprisingly) escalate and the forces of Chaos soon make themselves known.

Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine is an action-shooter game forged in a similar style to other games of the early 2010s, featuring burly armoured warriors shooting and chain-sawing their way through aliens. Yet, while the game's competitors focused on cover mechanics – getting your protagonists to hide behind concrete bulwarks and barriers – the Ultramarines had no such qualms. Space Marines, or Adeptus Astartes, don't seek cover. They seek the enemy. So Captain Titus and his battle-brothers had mechanics set around execution animations and building up a "fury meter" to fully unleash the true power of a gene-enhanced Angel of Death.

These delightfully gory kills added to the immersion and the power-fantasy of being an elite Adeptus Astartes. The developers really worked hard to create the brutal skill and raw power of a Space Marine. Controlling Titus, you feel the weight of his power armour and natural bulk, but this is not some lumbering brute. The figure remains agile and a vessel of pent-up violence that the player can unleash on xenos and traitors alike.

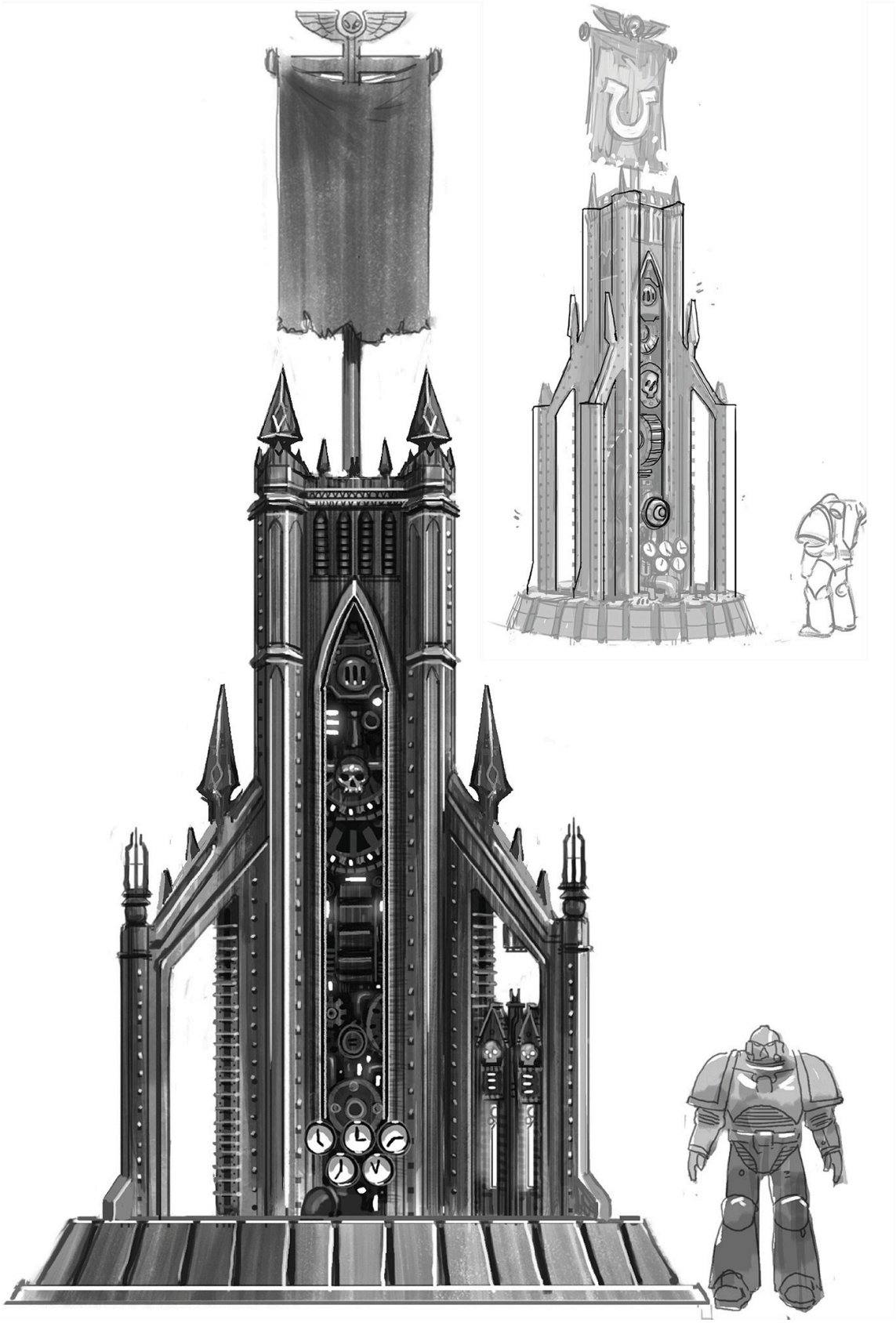
Captain Titus ready to slaughter allin his path

COURAGE AND HONOUR

Relic Entertainment was the developer of *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine*, and while it was initially suggested that the protagonist Chapter be the Blood Ravens from the *Dawn of War* series, this was changed early in development to be the Ultramarines. This was a wise decision, as the head of THQ, the game's publisher at the time, said the game was designed to introduce *Warhammer 40,000* to mainstream audiences. So this was a job for a mainline Chapter – the scions of Primarch Roboute Guilliman were required. One of the most famous Chapters both in-lore and out, the poster boys who graced every Space Marine box kit and army book in a *Warhammer* store.

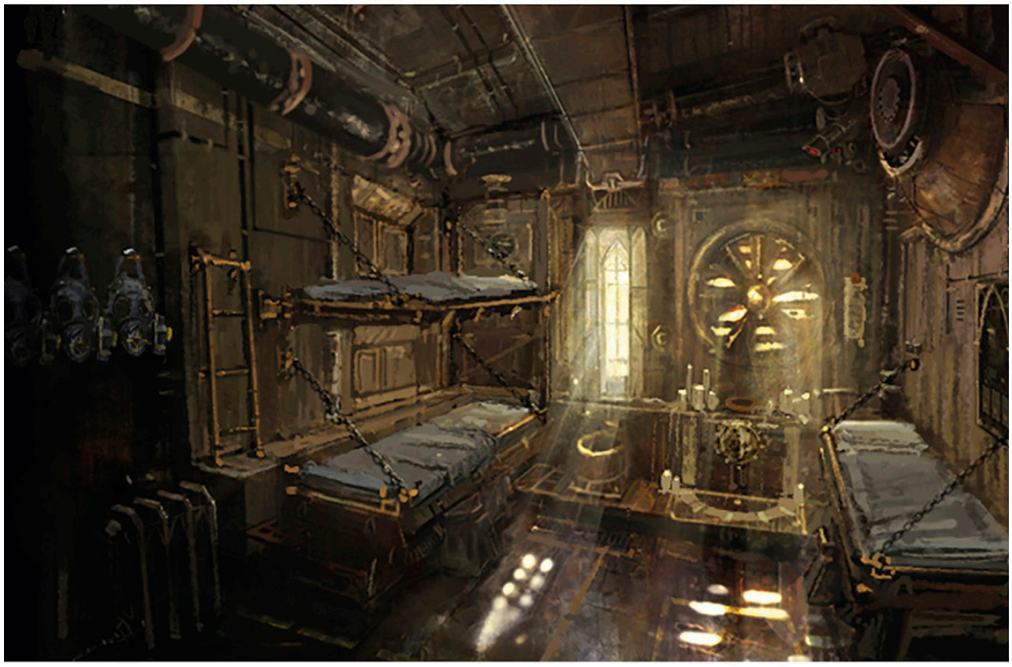
The task of leading the Ultramarines in this adventure to Graia was given to Captain Titus of the 2nd Company, accompanied by two battle-brothers: Veteran Sergeant Sidonus and a younger, by-the-book Brother Leandros.

One of forge world Graia's towering passageways



Concept and finalised art for a Mechanicus node, where weaponry and wargear could be exchanged and upgraded

Captain Demetrian Titus



The industrial environments and gigantic crane structures typically found on a forge world

CHARACTER STUDY

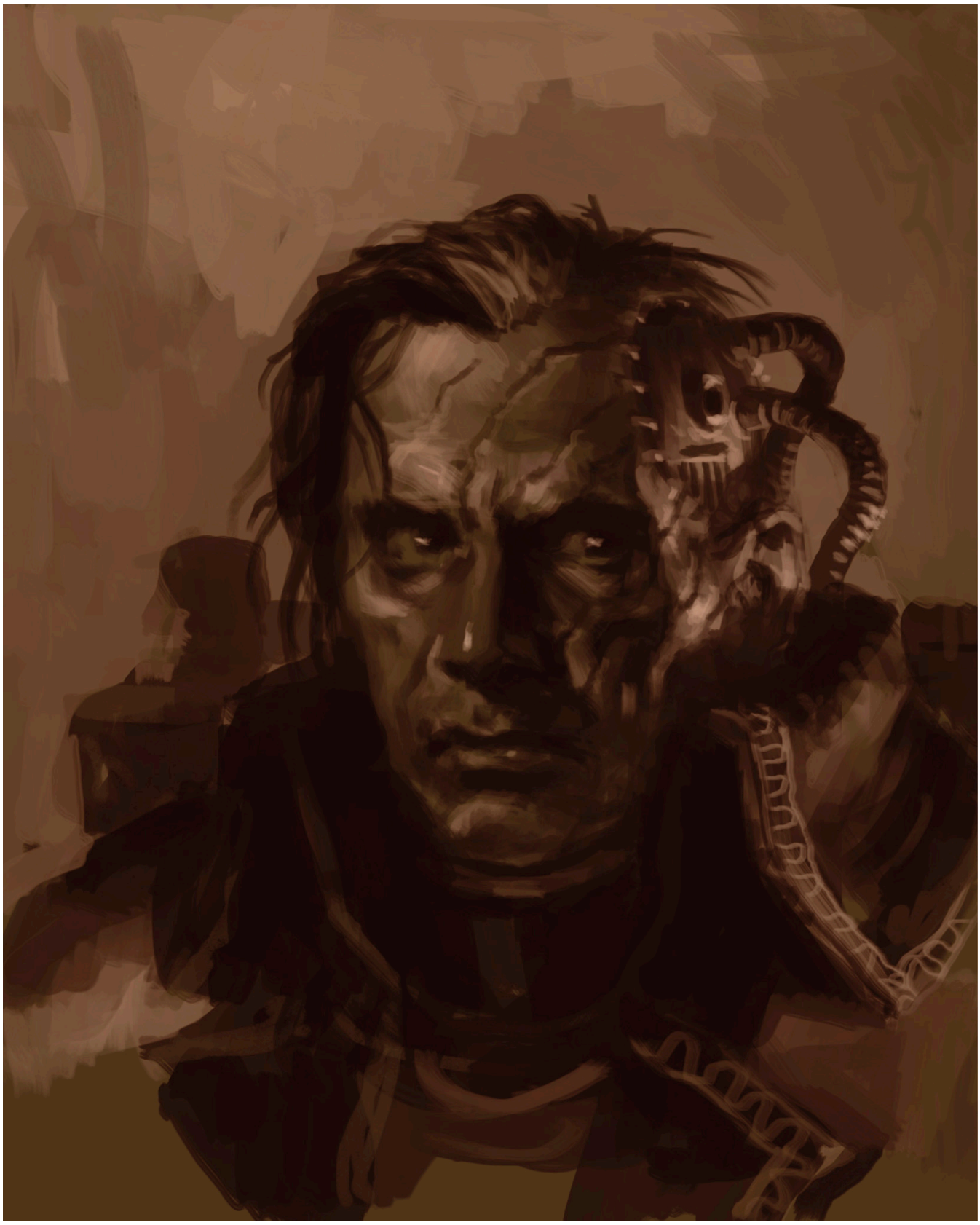
The cast of *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine* is a rich ensemble of compelling characters that aid, frustrate, and even betray Titus during his mission on Graia. He is accompanied by two Ultramarine battle-brothers who represent the naivete of an aspirant and the wisdom of a grizzled veteran.

Lieutenant Mira Nero leads the Imperial Guard presence on-world; she is a brave, component leader and gives the player a Human point of view, showing how mortals revere and are awed by Space Marines. Then there is Inquisitor Drogan who, as is so often the case when the Inquisition is involved in *Warhammer 40,000* stories, is the trigger for the events on Graia.

Line art for Inquisitor Thrax

"The Codex Astartes is a set of rules. They guide us, shape us as Ultramarines, teach us to place duty and honour above all. But how we live with those rules is the true test of a Space Marine. And you have failed."

—CAPTAIN DEMETRIAN TITUS



Head study for Inquisitor Drogan

Inquisitor Drogan full concept

HONOR TO EMP

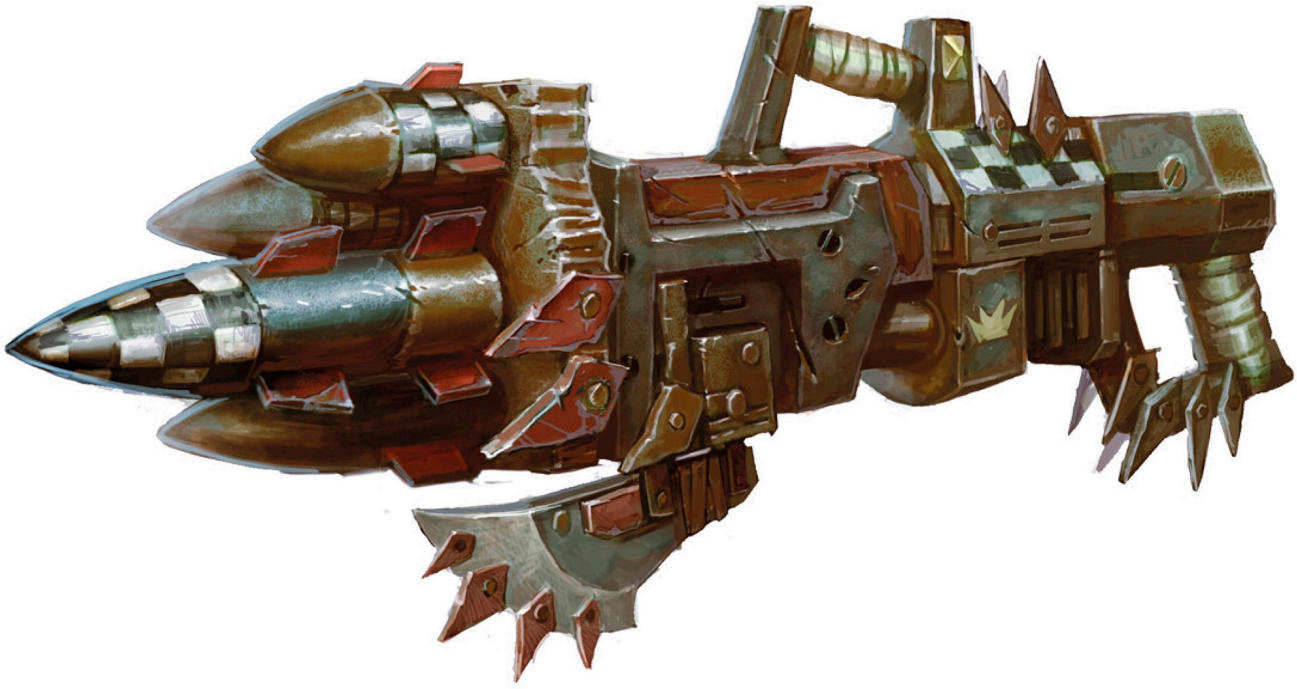
Initial concept sketch for armour silhouette exploration

Early rendered Astartes concepts

Selection of weapons, including chainswords, lascannon, meltagun and plasma gun

DA GREEN TIDE

The Orks invade the planet Graia, as it is home to one of the revered Warlord Titans. Warboss Grimskull wants the god-engine for his gathering Waaagh!. Orks made the perfect foe for a game like *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine*. They are characterful, not afraid to monologue, charge in hordes, and are especially satisfying for Titus to disembowel and pull apart.



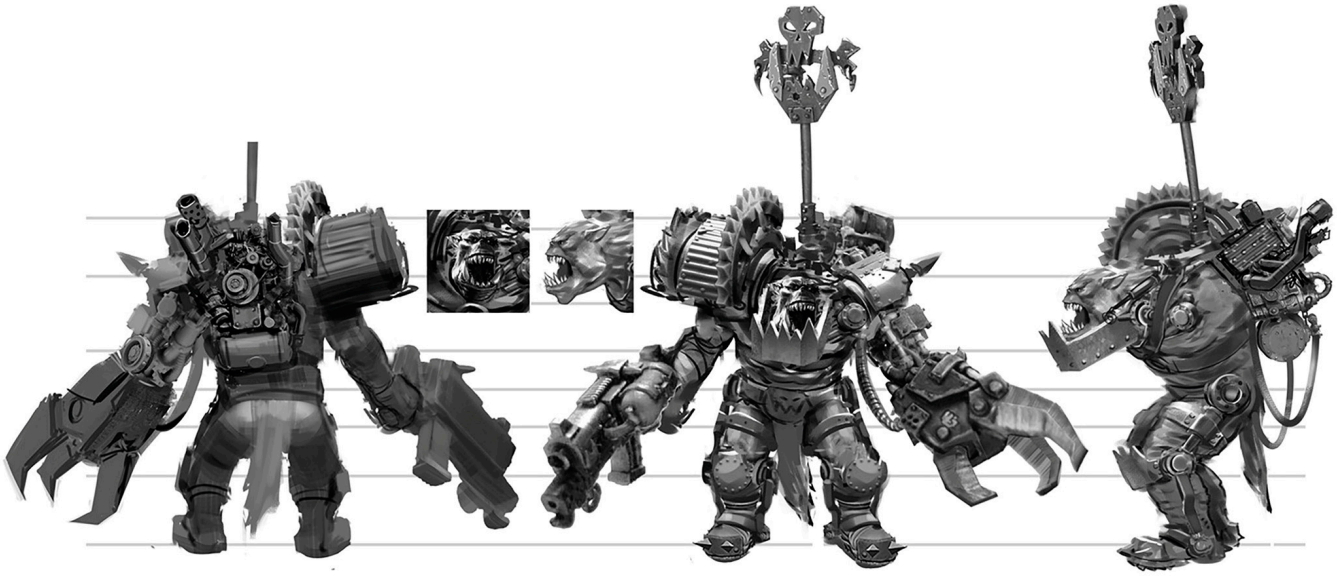
Ork Rokkit Launcha

Detailed Ork Digga with hatches open

The Ork Mek and his spanner

Ork Rok

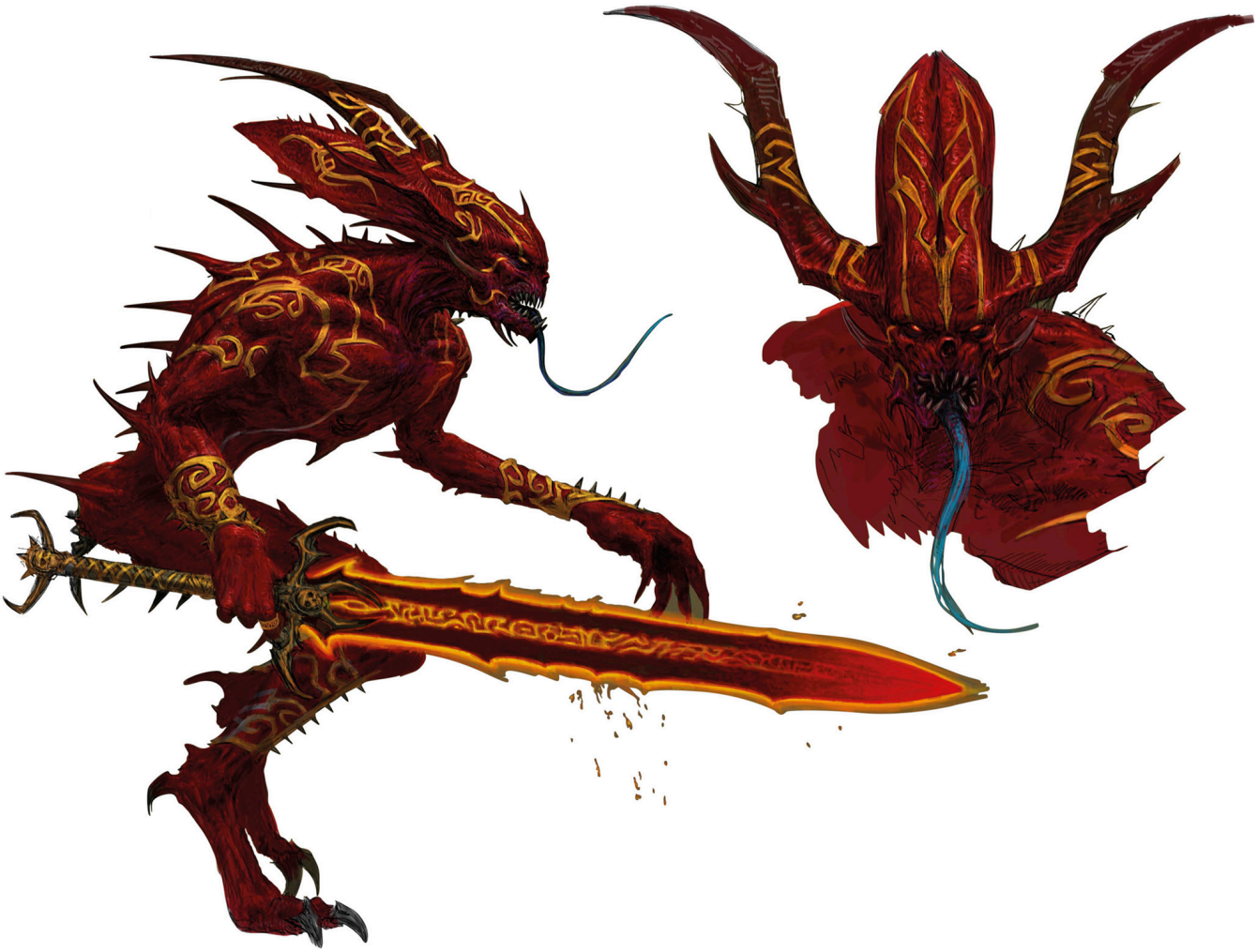
Bomb Squig concept illustration



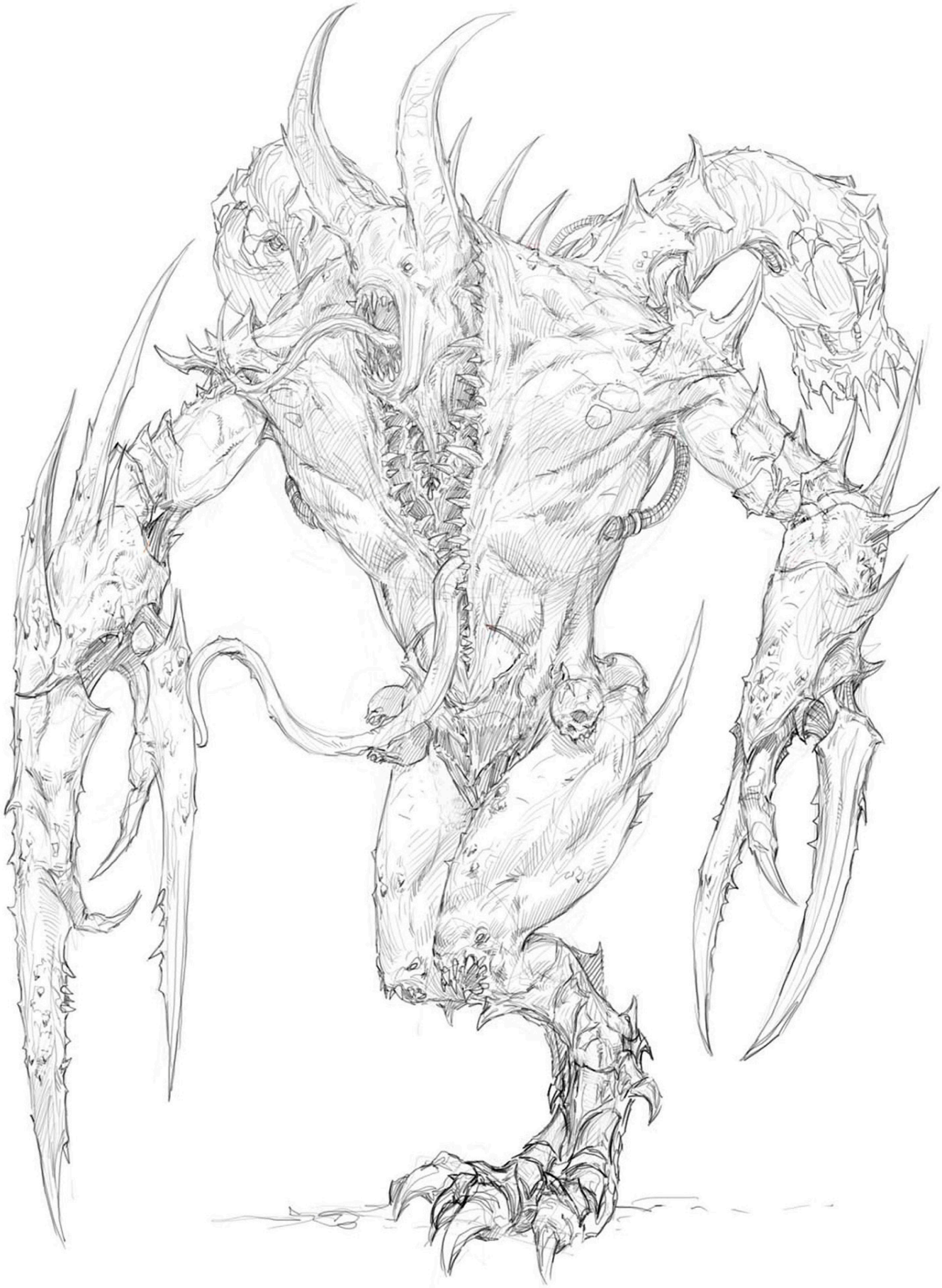
Early artwork of the Ork Warboss Grimskull

CHAOS ARISES

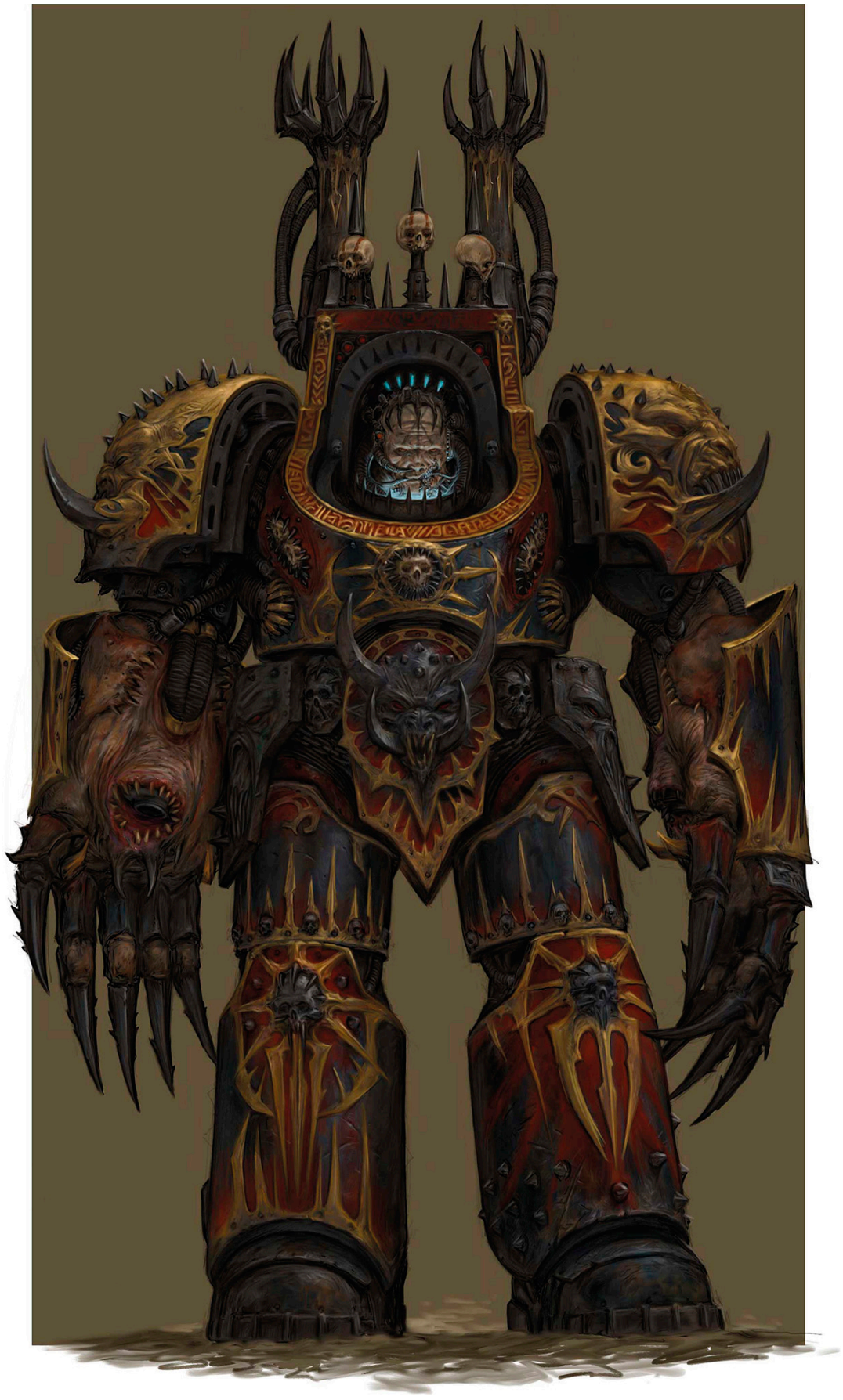
The Ultramarines fight more characters than just Orks. The despicable forces of Chaos arrive in the latter stages of the game, when Titus is tricked into acquiring a power source that opens a Warp portal and brings daemons and thralls of the Ruinous Powers forth. Chaos Lord Nemeroth is after the power source, hoping to use it for nefarious ends, but first he must take it from Titus.



Bloodletters, daemons of Khorne



Chaos Spawn illustration



Chaos Lord Nemeroth concept illustration

Drawing of a Chaos Space Marine helmet

Chaos-corrupted psykers

Not many games get a sequel after 13 years, but the Ultramarines were not to be denied another adventure, and so *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II* was released late in 2024. While the first game had been a success, *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II* was a certified mega-hit, selling over five million copies in less than six months. The game is a good barometer of just how popular *Warhammer 40,000* has become in the last decade.

Taking over the mantle of *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II's* developers was the team at Saber Interactive. This was an inspired choice, as the developers had cut their teeth on a series of games known for their surging swarms of zombies. This proprietary swarm-tech was put to use on the xenos stars of *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II* – the Tyranids!

Once more, we follow Titus, who starts the game as a member of the Deathwatch, on penitent duty following the events of the first game. No spoilers, but it's safe to say that he has been demoted from captain and rejoins his brothers in the Ultramarines as a lieutenant. This neatly syncs up with the canon of the current Ultramarines codex.

Of course, since the first game, Games Workshop has introduced the Primaris Space Marines. These characters are larger and even more powerful Adeptus Astartes than their firstborn brethren. The developers leaned into this in *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II*, showcasing the new design of the Mark X Tacticus power armour, as well as the pure strength of a Primaris, whose bodies now contained additional implants. Most notably, the implants included Magnificat for enhanced growth and the Belisarian Furnace to make the new breed of Adeptus Astartes even hardier than before. The executions of enemies larger and more monstrous than Orks remained delightfully gory and opened up a few new game mechanics, like the gun strike.

It wasn't just the Space Marines that looked fantastic; the environment of the war-torn 41st Millennium was truly captured, from the fetid marsh and jungle of Kadaku, to the dense urban hive world of Avarax, to the planet of Demerium, a burial world and excavation site hiding a sinister secret.

All this makes *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II* the ultimate AAA action-based video game. Who knows what adventures await Lieutenant Titus in the coming years?

Lieutenant Titus prepares for battle against the Tyranid swarms

OLDER AND WISER

Lieutenant Titus returns in *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II*. In the intervening century, Titus has spent time on penance duty with the Deathwatch, but he rejoins the Ultramarines, ready to serve once more. He is accompanied by two skeptical companions, Sergeant Valorem Gadriel and Brother Meduras Chairon. Titus must once again prove to his companions that he is free of the corrupting influence that caused his time away from the Chapter in the first place.

Some Space Marines may harbour some resentment at being demoted, but not Titus; he is older and wiser. Now that he has crossed the Rubicon Primaris, he is ready to serve his Chapter with fervour again.

Portrait study of Titus

Rendered portrait of Gadriel

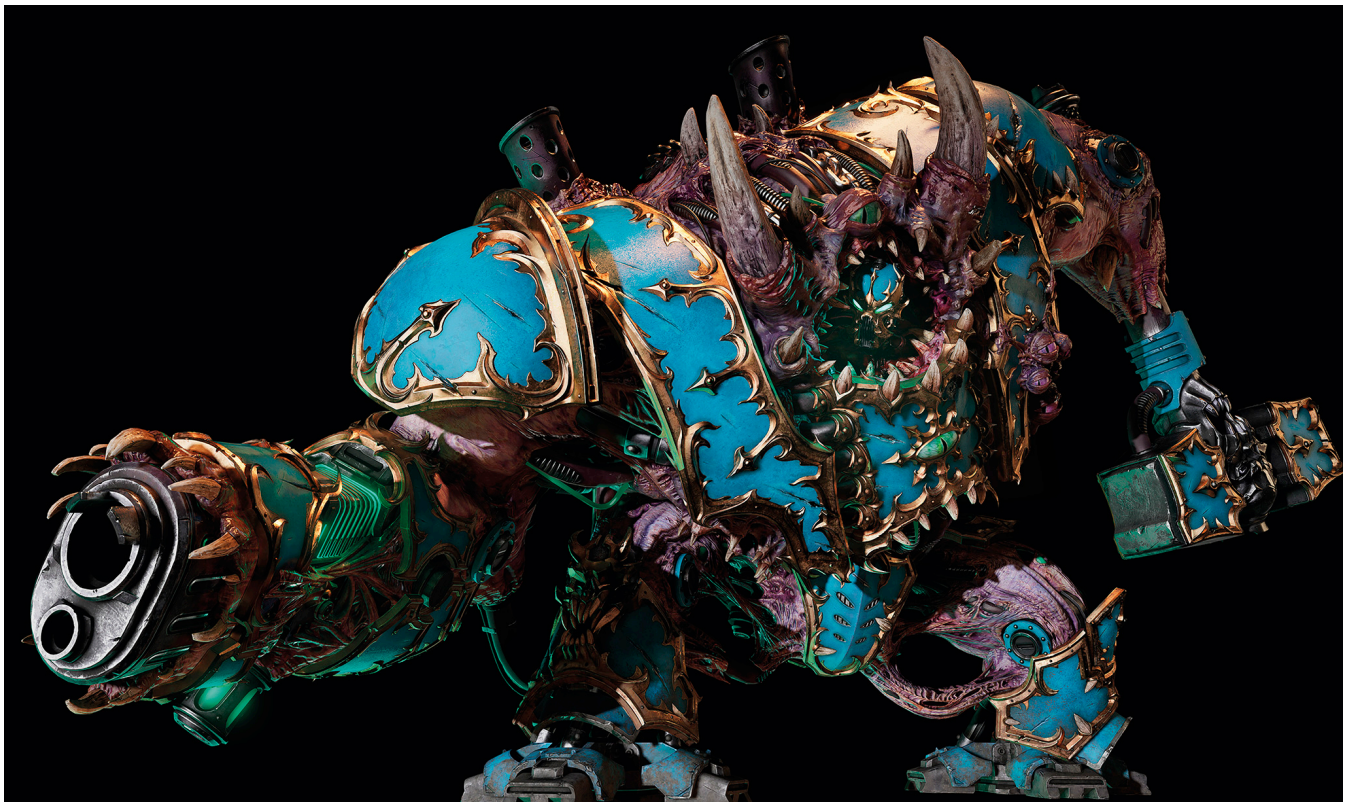
Pre-invasion splendour of hive world Avarax

Banners and formations of the Cadian 8th Regiment

BRUTE POWER

Kept alive in a state of agony and insanity, Helbrutes are Chaos Space Marines fused within an ancient walking sarcophagus and war machine. Their inherent madness and deep hatred for their former battle-brothers, the loyal Space Marines of the Imperium, have intensified over the countless millennia of their existence, warping them beyond reason with every moment of pure loathing and agony.

The Helbrutes of the Thousand Sons may have it even worse, for with the time dilation that comes with serving in such a Traitor Legion, every second is an eternity of further damnation.



Helbrute primed for action

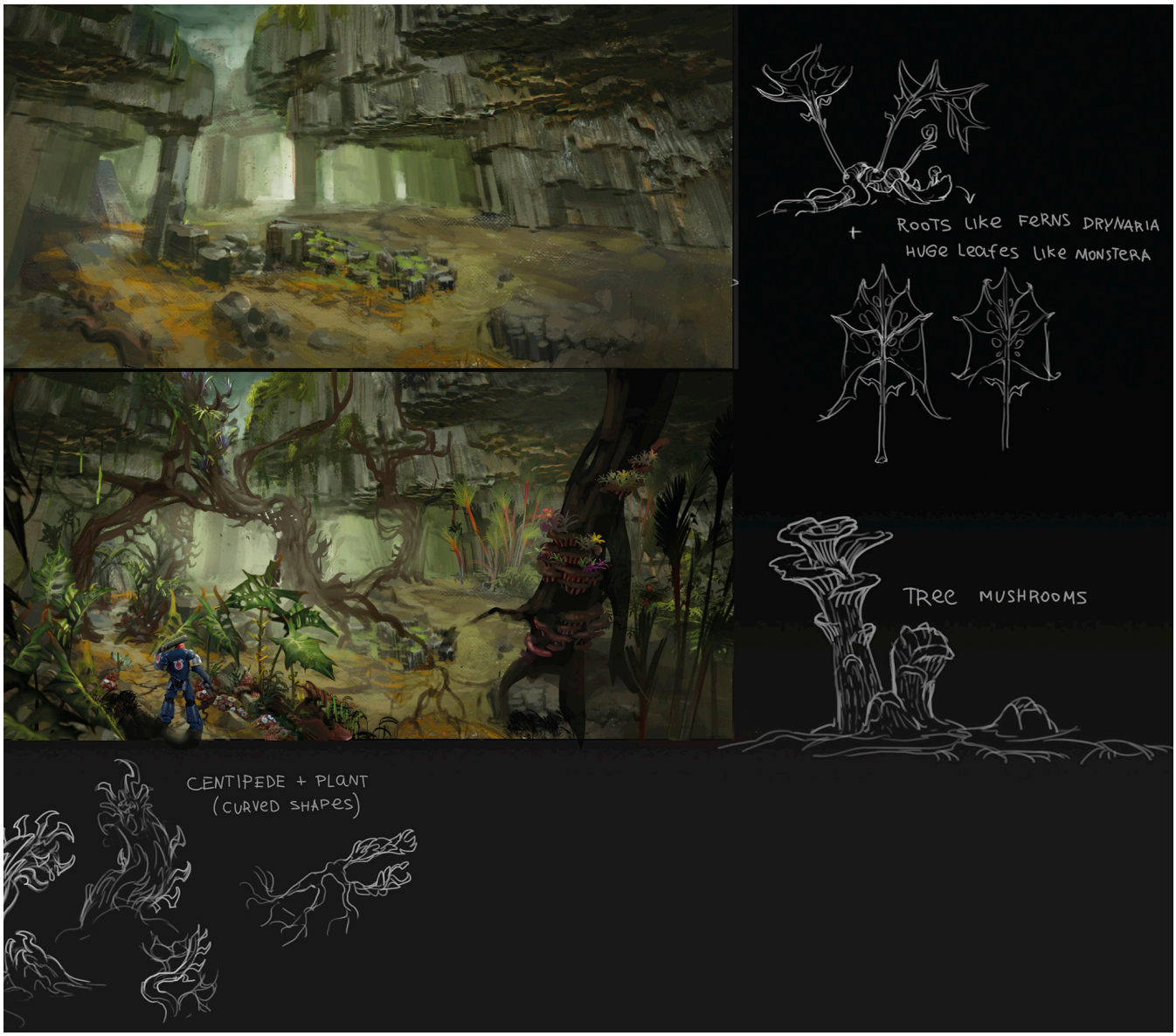
"You tiny grains of sand, prattling as you tumble. For a moment it seemed you might do my work for me, but alas I must finish this myself. Witness true power!"

– SORCERER LORD IMURAH OF THE THOUSAND SONS

ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING

Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine II is set over multiple planets. The variety of locations gave the developers a chance to contrast the differing areas of the game, keeping it fresh for players. It also provides a chance for players to explore the breadth of worlds within the Imperium, from the dense jungles and marshes on Kadaku, to the hive spires and Mechanicus facilities on Avarax, all the way to the mist-shrouded cathedrals on Demerium.

It wasn't just the outside that the developers at Saber Interactive created; players got to see the insides of vast voidships of the Ultramarine fleet, including the green hololith-illuminated strategium, and even the great hall of the Astropathic Relay Station. These environments were great for *Warhammer 40,000* fans to finally see on-screen.



A flora exploration of Kadaku

A main stair in the hive

Orbital plasma battery at the Mechanicus facility on Kadaku

Chaos storms wrack Demerium

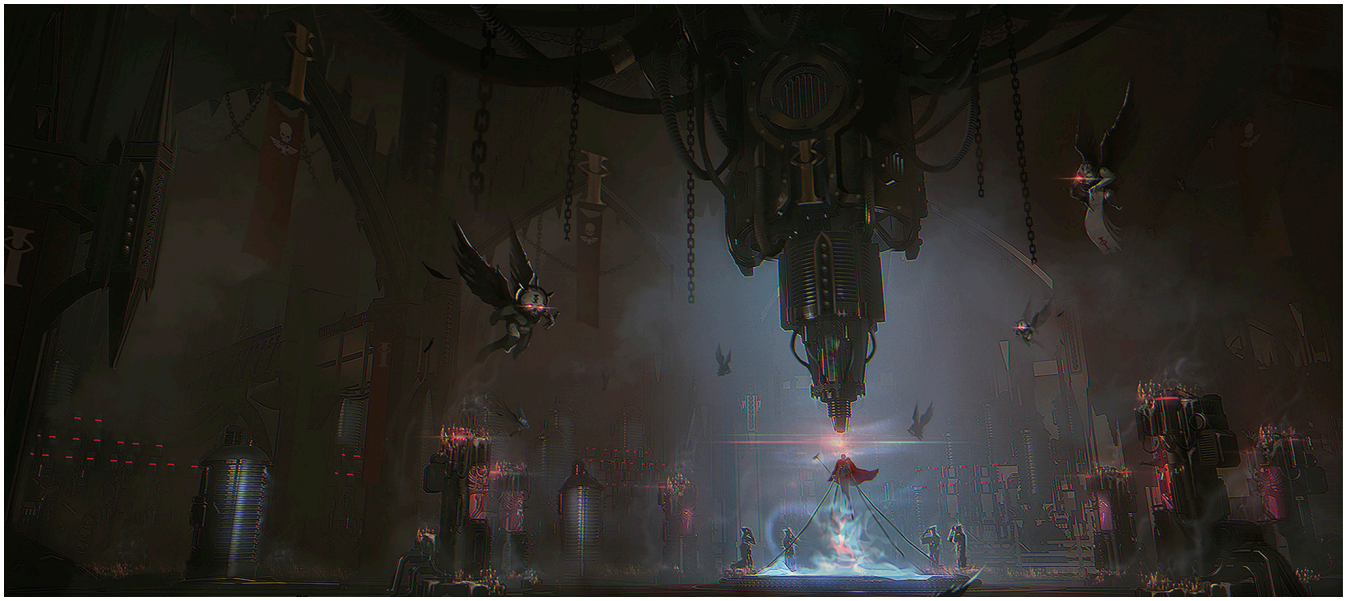
Capital hive on Avarax

A psyber cherub

A Redemptor Dreadnought

A Valkyrie

A Baneblade super-heavy tank



Astropathic chamber

Avarax under siege by the Tyranids

"Brothers! The Heretic clamour for a taste of victory! But we will defy them this day as we have defied them for ten millennia. We are the sons of Ultramar, servants to the Emperor and guardians of the Imperium. Let these wretches feel the wrath of ancient vengeance!"

– CHAPTER MASTER MARNEUS CALGAR

Horus Lupercal flanked by Mortarion and Fulgrim

THE HORUS HERESY

The Horus Heresy: Legions

Ten thousand years before the Fall of Cadia, the nascent Imperium was caught in a terrible civil war. Once the Emperor had unified Terra and Mars, he made for the stars to bring all the scattered colonies of Mankind under his aegis. During this Great Crusade, he searched for and found his genetically forged sons, the Primarchs, who had been lost due to the machinations of the Ruinous Powers.

Years and countless military operations later, with the Great Crusade at its zenith, the Emperor suddenly returned to Terra. He kept his reasons secret, only divulging that he would continue a great work in the depths of his palace and that he would leave his favoured gene-son, Horus, now named Warmaster, in charge to continue the galactic campaign in his stead.

Yet the seeds of resentment and heresy would be laid. Horus would turn against his father and bring with him half the Legiones Astartes. It was the greatest betrayal in all of Humanity's long history, a war that would last decades, cost countless of lives, and ultimately shape the fate of Humanity for the next ten millennia.

The Horus Heresy is the cornerstone of the *Warhammer 40,000* setting, but its first appearance was actually in a supplement for *Rogue Trader*, called the *Book of the Astronomican*. It featured as a mere paragraph, seemingly written almost on a whim. It was only when the first edition of *Adeptus Titanicus* began to be worked on that it rose to prominence. There needed to be a reason for Imperial forces to fight each other, as there was only a budget for one sprue design in the box. From these practical concerns, the Horus Heresy grew from a footnote and, eventually, into a 64-novel (and counting) series featuring many dramatis personae ranging from demi-gods to bit-players.

There have been a couple of video games set in the Horus Heresy, but the most eminent is *The Horus Heresy: Legions* – a polished arena-card-battler game featuring many of the Heresy's greatest protagonists and antagonists. Over the game's lifetime, card sets cover the core Warmaster decks to the Drop Site Massacre, Isstvan, the Burning of Prospero, Calth, and even the Siege of Terra.

The cards that follow are just a glimpse of how incredibly dense this era of storytelling is, and why for many fans, this decades-long opera is their favourite part of *Warhammer*.

Warlord Vheren Ashurhaddon

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Horus Heresy has a cast of rich and varied characters that have been fleshed out over the last decade in a novel series. These characters are perfect material for a digital card-battler, where warriors and named legionnaires have special powers, fighting styles, and tactical preferences. This is brought into even sharper focus with the Primarchs, for this was an era when the Emperor's sons were active and at war with each other.

Alpharius

Vulkan

Angron

Magnus the Red

Perturabo

Ferrus Manus

Death Guard icon

MACRAGGE
XIII

Ultramarines Legion card back

Ruined fortified bridge within Ghur

WARHAMMER AGE OF SIGMAR

Warhammer Age of Sigmar: Realms of Ruin
Warhammer Age of Sigmar: Storm Ground
Warhammer Quest: Silver Tower

A crack of thunder follows as lightning streams downwards amidst roiling wind, from which the Stormcast Eternals emerge – golden-clad warriors forged by Sigmar to bring order across the Mortal Realms. Their enemies are powerful and numerous, the myriad forces of darkness, undeath, and Chaos.

With *Warhammer Age of Sigmar* still being a relatively young setting, there had only been a few digital versions based on the franchise. Frontier Developments took on the mantle to create the ultimate *Warhammer Age of Sigmar* video game with the release of *Warhammer Age of Sigmar: Realms of Ruin* in the winter of 2023.

The real-time strategy game had a focus on action and battle. It uses a broad rock-paper-scissors paradigm, meaning some unit types are better at countering others, with commanders and characters buffing squads under their auspices. This way, in infantry-versus-infantry combat, the units may be fairly balanced against each other, but cavalry units will excel against them. Meanwhile, flying units can potentially dominate cavalry, but will be weaker against massed hordes of warriors on foot. There are obviously deeper and subtler calculations that can overcome this metric, such as magic, supporting units, or flanking attacks, but that is the general idea.

The title launched with the four starting factions – the aforementioned Stormcast Eternals of the Hammers of Sigmar Stormhost, the swamp-dwelling Orruk Kruleboyz, the tormented spirits of Shyish known as the Nighthaunt, and the followers of Tzeentch, the devious God of Change.

The battles in *Warhammer Age of Sigmar: Realms of Ruin* take place in the bestial lands of Ghur, one of the eight Mortal Realms that make up the Cosmos Arcane. Ghur is a realm of primordial majesty, amber savannahs, tall mountains that range far, and forested hunting grounds…for in Ghur it is said you are the feaster or the feast. Often both.

The realm was perfectly realised in the game, as were the forces that would battle there. This was a game with no exotic art style; instead it brought the expertly painted Citadel Miniatures and lush environments seen in *White Dwarf* and the game books to life in authentic detail. The game looked sumptuous and gilded, achieving the desire to bring the forces of the Mortal Realms to life in a way not seen since the game first appeared in the wake of the End Times.

Sigrun leads a detachment of the Hammers of Sigmar into battle

THE FIRST

There are many Stormhosts forged by Sigmar, but the first was the Hammers of Sigmar. They are the epitome of the Stormcast Eternals; clad in golden armour and blue inlays, they were the foundational Stormhost to be hurled upon Sigmar's divine lightning. They were sent to face the forces of Chaos as the divine warriors under Sigmar's regency. As well as being the first, they are the largest in number. While other Stormhosts may specialise in certain areas, the Hammers can bring the might of their many chambers to bear.

A caged serf

Sigrun of the Hammers of Sigmar, flanked by Knight-Vexillor Iden and the wizard Demetrios

The Hammers of Sigmar embattled

The chained mountains of Ghur

Stormcast Eternals prepare to march

Stormhost commanders make their plans

Warhammer Age of Sigmar: Storm Ground brings turn-based strategy to the Mortal Realms. This game, created by the people at Gasket Games, uses an isometric hex grid to bring the conflicts of *Warhammer Age of Sigmar* to the screen. This gives the game a distinct look and certainly invokes the *Warhammer Underworlds* series of table-top tactical games, which also use boards with hex spaces to determine movement, combat range, and direction. These games are taut thrillers, using smaller forces and clear objectives, compared to larger battle systems.

The gameplay of *Storm Ground* revolves around summoning units with power, but any unspent power turns into aether, which can be used to activate special abilities on troops and forces that are already summoned. This gives the game a nice risk-reward conundrum, where flooding the storm ground arena with your forces can give you the numbers, but they won't be able to perform optimally if you haven't saved enough aether to activate abilities.

The game features three of the core factions: the valiant Stormcast Eternals, the vile Maggotkin, and the Nighthaunt. The Stormcast are depicted in vibrant blues and golden hues, while Nurgle's servants, unsurprisingly, wallow in the browns and greens associated with the Flyfather. Meanwhile, the Nighthaunt and their environments are all spectral blues and hues of white.

Each of the forces plays around with the core gameplay system to give it an individual playstyle. These are easy to identify due to the game's beautiful visuals and compelling animations. Even the battlefield plays into this, in an intriguing meta way, with many of the arenas being hex-shaped, mirroring the primary movement paradigms of the game itself.

Lord-Celestant on Stardrake does battle with a Nighthaunt foe (rough colour)

The realm of Shyish

Lady of Ashes artwork

Stormcast mounted on Stardrake

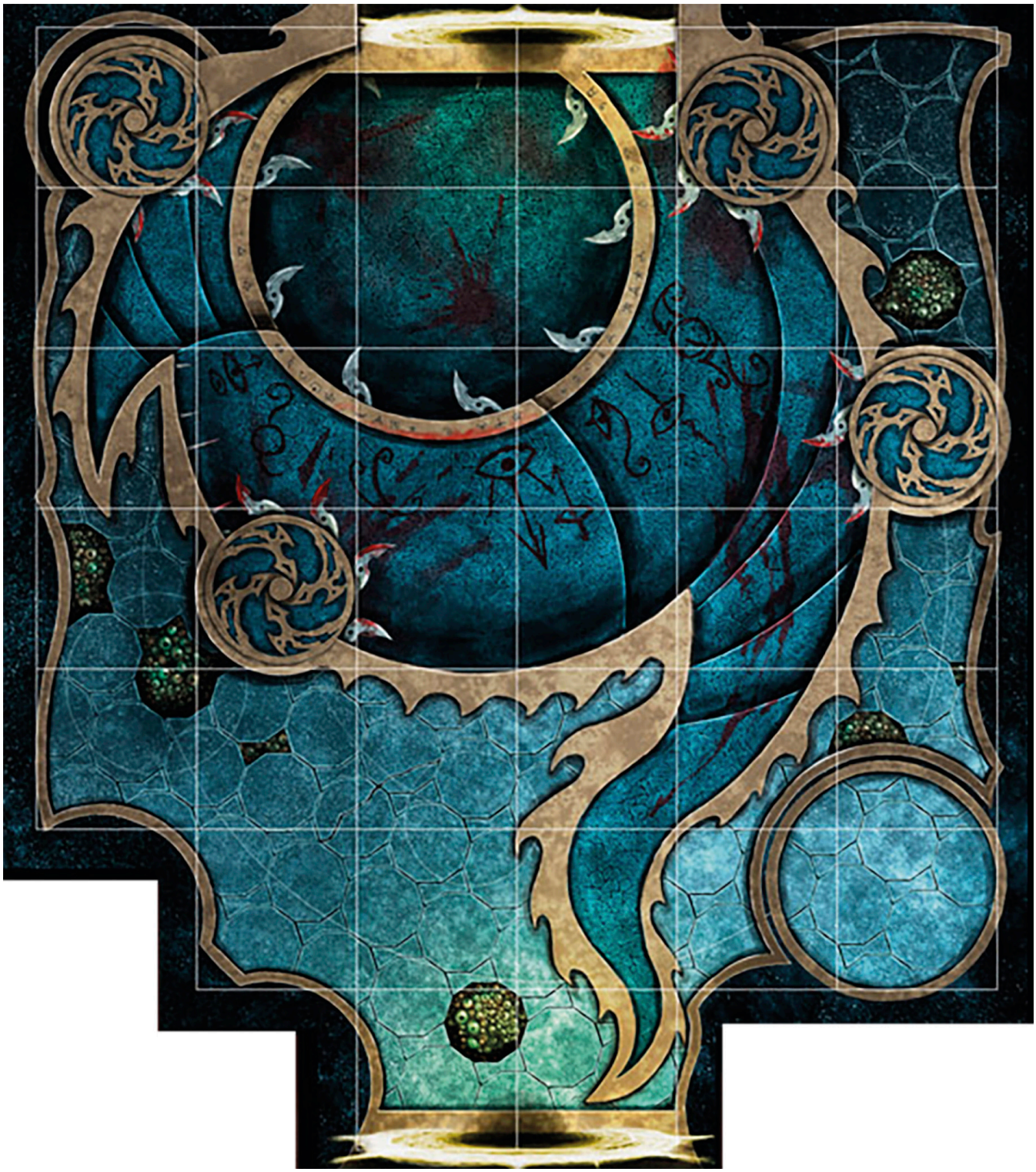
Warhammer Quest: Silver Tower

For the last few years, *Warhammer Quest* has been appearing on iPhones and iPad screens across the world. The compelling top-down dungeon crawler was based on the original board game, created by a group of talented developers based in Guildford, England.

There was a great deal of creative force behind this game and the sequels that followed, and *Warhammer Quest: Silver Tower* evolved the *Warhammer Quest* format for a third time. Cutting out what some considered the "boring bit" of walking from one room to another, the game focused on the puzzle-solving and strategy aspects of fighting monsters, with highly customised heroes in the Tzeentchian environment of a Silver Tower.

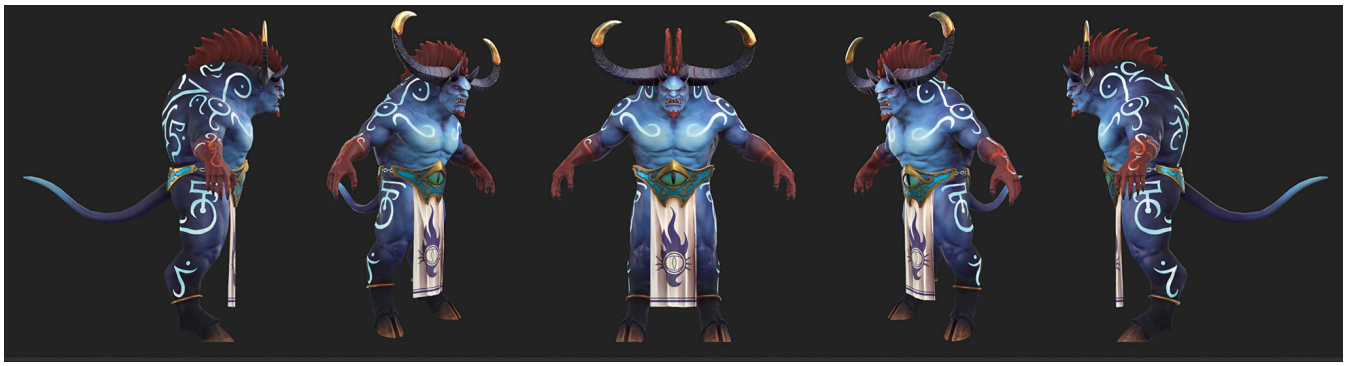
This version of the game was set in the Age of Sigmar, slipping between the dimension planes to face the sorcerous servant of Tzeentch, the Gaunt Summoner. The floor plans and environments of the *Warhammer Quest* games provided these mobile dungeon crawlers with plenty of character. For *Warhammer Quest: Silver Tower,* this was taken to the next level; the colours, the rooms of gleaming clockwork, the devious traps, and the multi-coloured daemons made it an impressive game to look at.

The encounters in the game were compact, focused, and turn-based, creating a "just one more go" compulsion to the gameplay. This is, of course, what the Gaunt Summoner requires, for all are playthings to the servants of Tzeentch, and so players of the game were doing the Chaos God's bidding, just as much as the heroes sent into the dungeon's depths.



Floor plan of Tzeentchian stairs

Gaunt Summoner render and staff



Ogroid Thaumaturge from a variety of angles

Realm of Light

Brimstone Horror in T-pose

Stormcast Eternal of the Anvils of the Heldenhammer in T-pose

Realm of Beasts, level one

◀ CONTENTS

Forces of the Empire and Chaos clash in *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos*

WARHAMMER FANTASY

Warhammer: Mark of Chaos
Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning
Mordheim: City of the Damned
Warhammer: End Times – Vermintide
Warhammer: Vermintide II
Warhammer: Chaosbane
Total War: Warhammer
Total War: Warhammer II
Total War: Warhammer III

"There is no escape from Chaos. It marks us all."

So ends one of the greatest game trailers...well, ever! In my humble opinion anyway. Watching the clip as research for this book, I can say it still stands up nearly 20 years later – proving the concept of time is a Tzeentchian trick! The trailer is still available to view and features a humble Warrior Priest who must not only ally with a High Elf Shadow Warrior, but also battle a Bloodthirster, although he is bolstered by the power of Sigmar at this direst of moments.

In any case, *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos* was an interesting project – it was more in keeping with the battle-focused games of the late '90s than what was to come in games such as *Total War*. The game had two single-player campaigns, each comprising four chapters. One followed the Empire and High Elf armies in a linear campaign, with the player able to choose the force composition. Optional side battles provided extra variety to the campaign structure. The second campaign option allowed players to marshal for the hordes of Chaos and Skaven. Yes, those cheeky, devious rat-men were back to play, despite no one in the Empire believing they are real.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the game was the inclusion of a duel mode. This was where the player could kit out a character and send him into personal combat against a rival hero unit. The fight was a thrilling encounter; although the player had limited agency during the fight itself, the selection of weapons and armour, and the hero's underlying statistics, had a significant impact on the results. It was a one-versus-one battle that remains unique to *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos*.

Still, for me, the best thing about this project remains the trailer: the Warrior Priest, the Chaos Warriors coming out of the fog, the Elf's preternatural skills, and the final moment as the Bloodthirster lands to make war with the Warrior Priest – it still makes the hairs stand up on my neck as I watch it again for the umpteenth time!

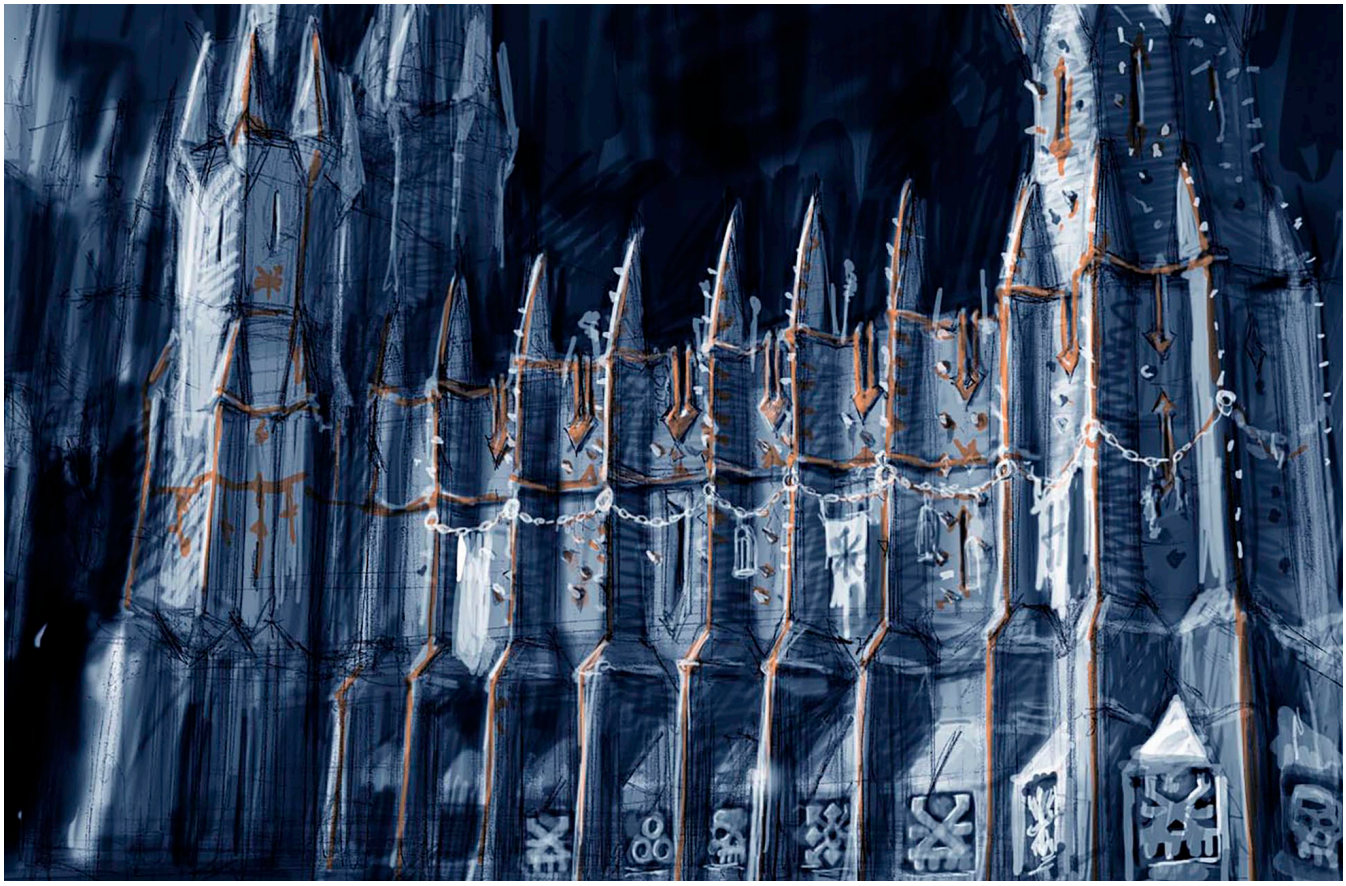
Ork Warboss

ARCHIMANCY

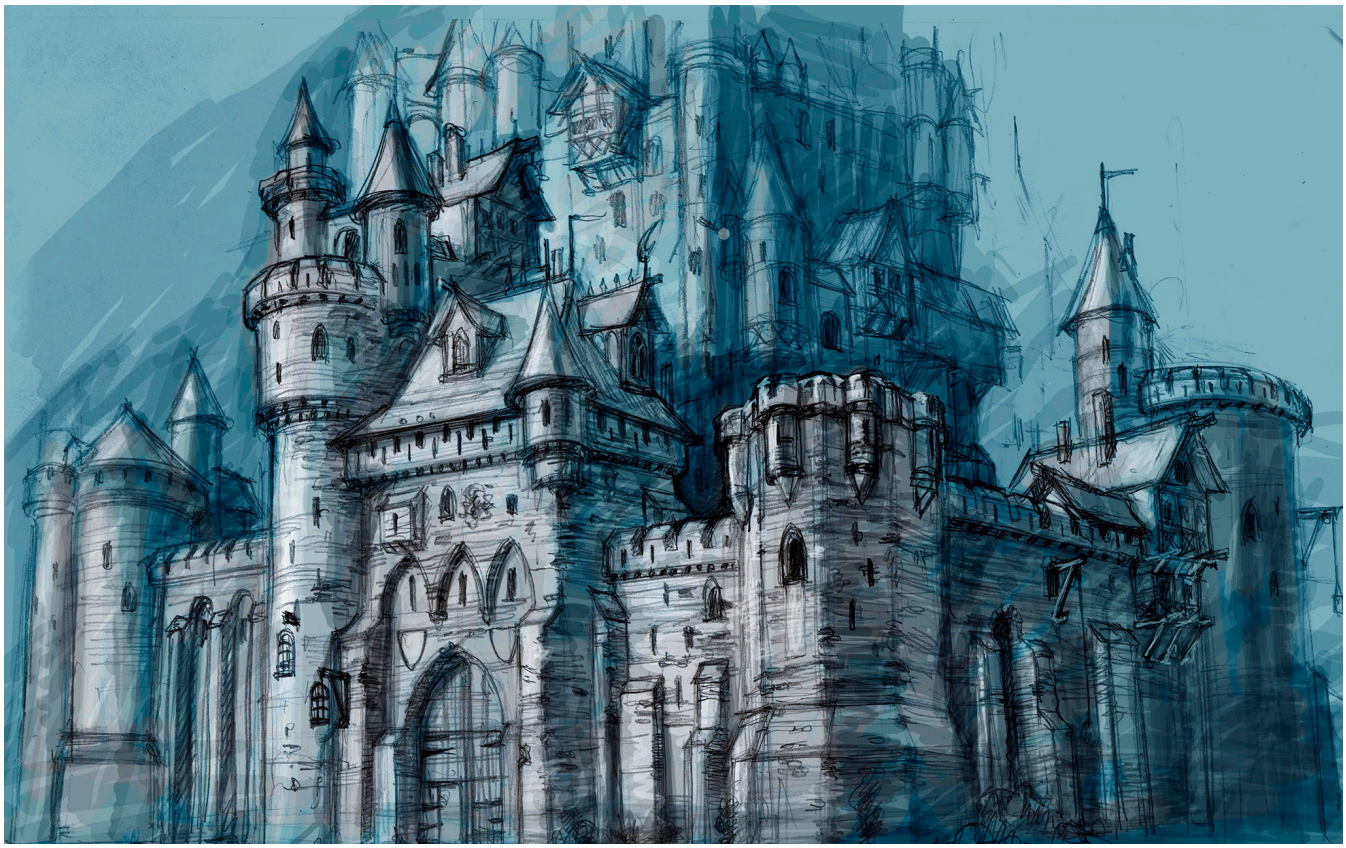
Like everything in the *Warhammer* world, the castles and bastions are big, often ridiculously large, with turrets and pinnacles that defy gravity. These strongholds were depicted in *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos*, with each race getting their own version. From the solid stone walls and square towers of an Empire fortress, to the gleaming spires of a High Elven castle, to the dark fastnesses of the Ruinous Powers.

Character

A High Elven mage



Chaos fortress



An Empire fortress

A Talabecland greatsword, front in coloured artwork and rear in line art

THE MARKED ARMIES

Warhammer: Mark of Chaos was released with a healthy roster from both the Order and Destruction sides of the scale; under each race were factions hailing from different realms. The Empire was represented by the states of Talabecland, Ostermark, and Nuln. The High Elves came from Ellyrion, the Shadowlands, and Saphery. Meanwhile, Chaos invaded with legions of Chaos Undivided, Khorne, and Nurgle. Orcs, Skaven, and the Dark Elves also brought their varied tribes and clans to bear.

A Skaven Grey Seer

Illustration of the Chaos fortress

Clan Skryre Warlock Engineer

Champion of Nurgle

Chaos Warrior

Illustration of Chaos Furies

During the autumn of 2008, hundreds of thousands of people went about their jobs or their studies, and then, when they had a spare moment, logged into the *Warhammer* world to live a second life as a Dwarf, High Elf, Orc, or soldier. This was not a place to live a virtual life running a shop or inn – blood and battle awaited, for this was *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning*, abbreviated to *WAR*.

Mythic Entertainment was the developer of this massive project, creating *Warhammer*'s first published massively multiplayer online game (MMO). The developers had recently had great success with a hit title that introduced realm-versus-realm (RvR) mechanics, a concept that was further developed and refined for *WAR*. This gameplay was a perfect fit for the war-hungry races of the *Warhammer* world.

The realm combat is what distinguished the game from other rival MMOs. It worked by siloing the warring factions into pairs, to fight perpetual wars in specific territories – the Dwarfs would battle the greenskins, the Empire was matched against the forces of Chaos, and the High Elves were to fight their hated kin, the Druchii, more commonly known as Dark Elves. Players could move between these zones but were inevitably involved in the ongoing battles and wars – a back-and-forth struggle for zone control that would eventually end in one of the sides' capitals being taken. The invaders could then loot the area for a period of time before being kicked out, and so the cycle would start again, for in *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning* – as with all iterations of this grimdark setting – war is eternal.

The territories and environments of these realm wars were awe-inspiring. At the risk of repeating myself from elsewhere in this book, the developers really did bring the world of *Warhammer* to life. From the icy mountains of Naggaroth, to the Dwarf halls along the Worlds Edge Mountains and legendary holds like Karak Eight Peaks, even into the Inevitable City of Tzeentch, the game looked gorgeous. In a way, it had to – the nature of an MMO was to keep the player engaged and coming back; therefore the environments needed to be compelling places, where nothing could stand still, new areas had to be uncovered, and new places to fight were guaranteed, alongside a regular and well-supported patching schedule.

The servers for this game are now archived, but players have found a way to continue this eternal war, whether that is deep on the internet or in other *Warhammer* games.

Green Knight concept art

Peasant Bowman ready to serve

Formidable Warrior of Khorne

Chosen of Nurgle armour concept

GRUMLOK & GAZBAG

The unofficial ambassadors of *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning* were the iconic duo Grumlok and Gazbag. Grumlok is the nefarious Warboss of the Bloody Sunz tribe. His constant companion is the always-annoying Goblin Shaman Gazbag, who is often perched on the Warboss's ample shoulder. These two dominated the Badlands, but struggled to elevate the Bloody Sunz into a full-on Waaagh!.

Grumlok and his sidekick were not only immortalised in the game but also in metal form, as a limited-edition Citadel Miniature that was released with the special-edition box set of the video game. This model proved so popular that it created chaos (little c) in the Nottingham factory at the time!

Illustration of Grumlok and Gazbag

Orc Boss

Stronghold gate

Makeshift Orc armour

Dwarf Deeps

Dwarf Ironbreaker

Dwarf Thunderbarge airship

"Manling coins are like their words: never trust them. Use your weighing scales and keep your axe handy!"

– WELL-KNOWN DWARF SAYING

ELTHARION THE BLIND

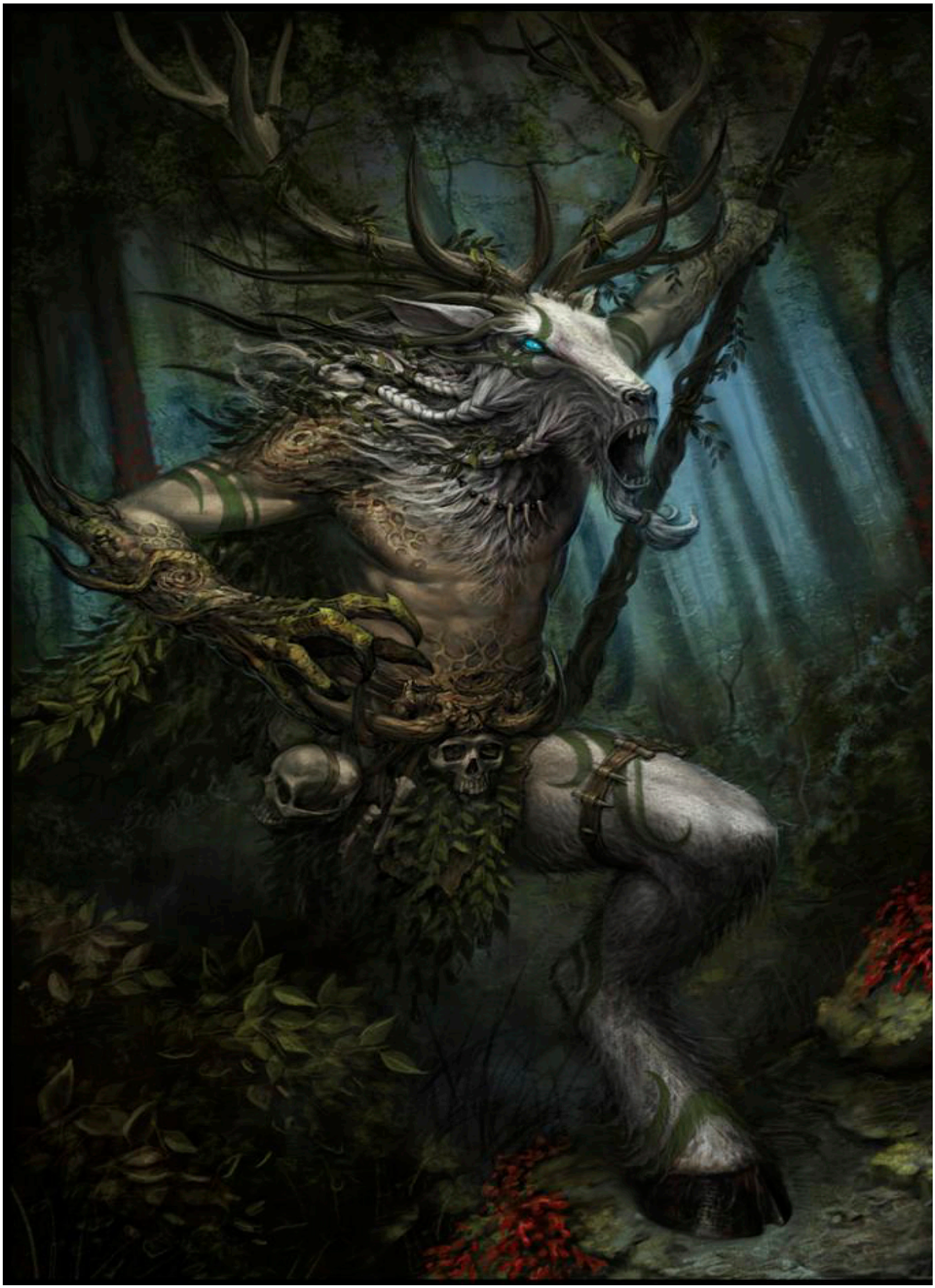
Around the sixth edition of *Warhammer Fantasy Battle*, on which the *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning* is based, the High Elf Prince, known as Eltharion the Grim, was presented as blind. This was due to the Witch King, who defeated Eltharion and took his sight. Eltharion would later recover and train with the Swordmasters of Hoeth. However, in later editions, Eltharion was returned to his previous station as the grim gatekeeper of Tor Yvresse.

A Dark Elf Sorceress

Volcanic wastes

The Witch King

An illustration of a slave caravan



The Elven god, Kurnous

The Forest of Avelorn

An Elven Swordmaster

"I tread the Path of Loathing. I despise you, kin, even as you stand before me. I deny your existence, your right to live. I beg Khaine for me to end your abhorrence."

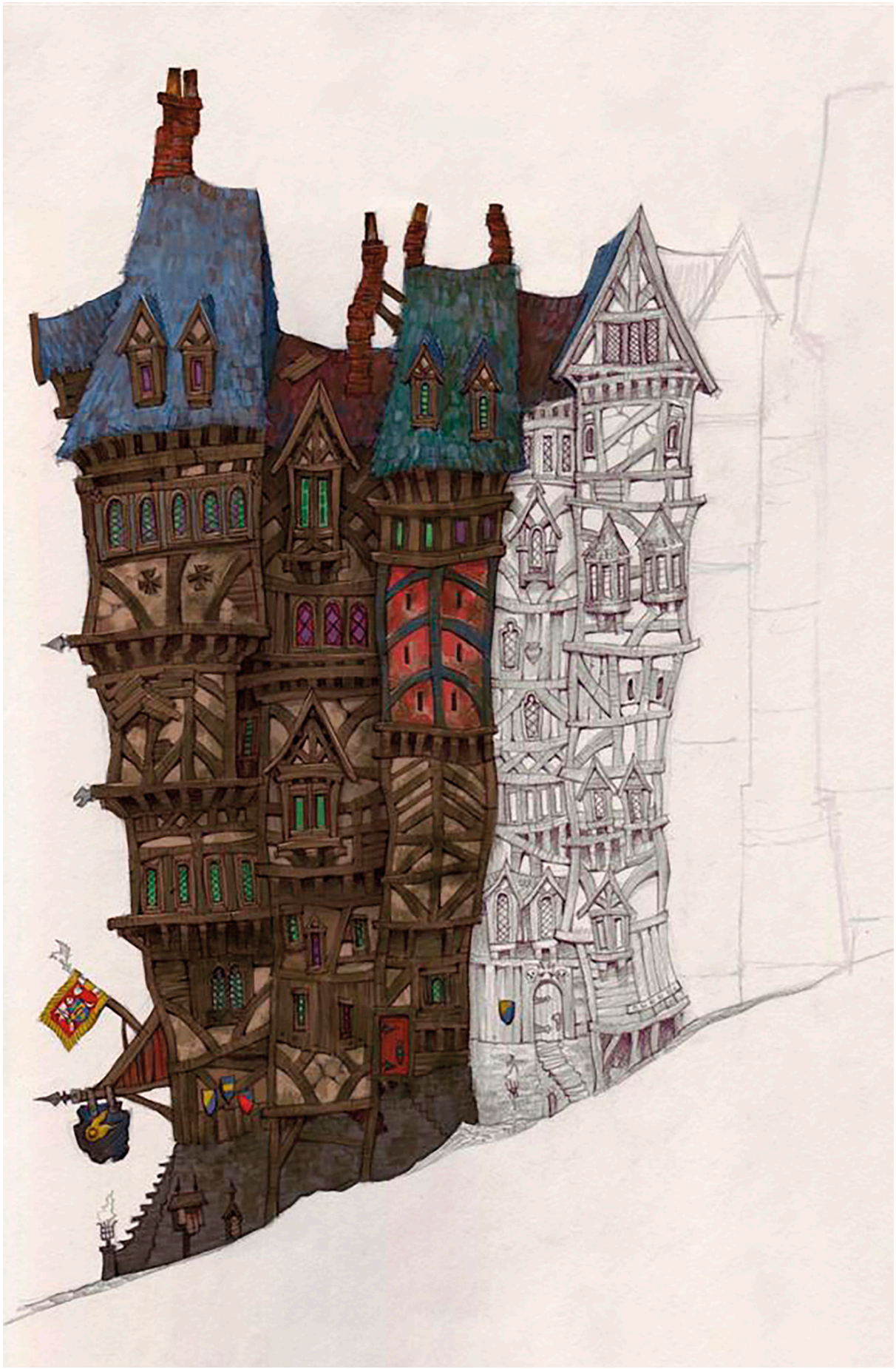
– BLACK GUARD OF NAGGAROND, NAME UNKNOWN

WITCH HUNT

The Order of the Silver Hammer was first formed in secret to defend Sigmar's realm from mendacious magic users and daemons. Its founder, Wolfgart Kreiger, was appointed by Sigmar for this holy task. Kreiger knew it was a labour beyond one man and so recruited like-minded warriors. For centuries, they performed their duties in secret. Then in the time of the Grand Theogonist Siebold II, the Order was forced to take a more public role, for its enemies had become more aggressive, and so the Order's agents would no longer hide in the shadows but declare themselves – let the populace and any heretics or daemons they may harbour fear the arrival of a Witch Hunter!

A Witch Hunter

Emperor Karl Franz concept art



Exploration of the Empire's tall, ramshackle city buildings

Empire windmill

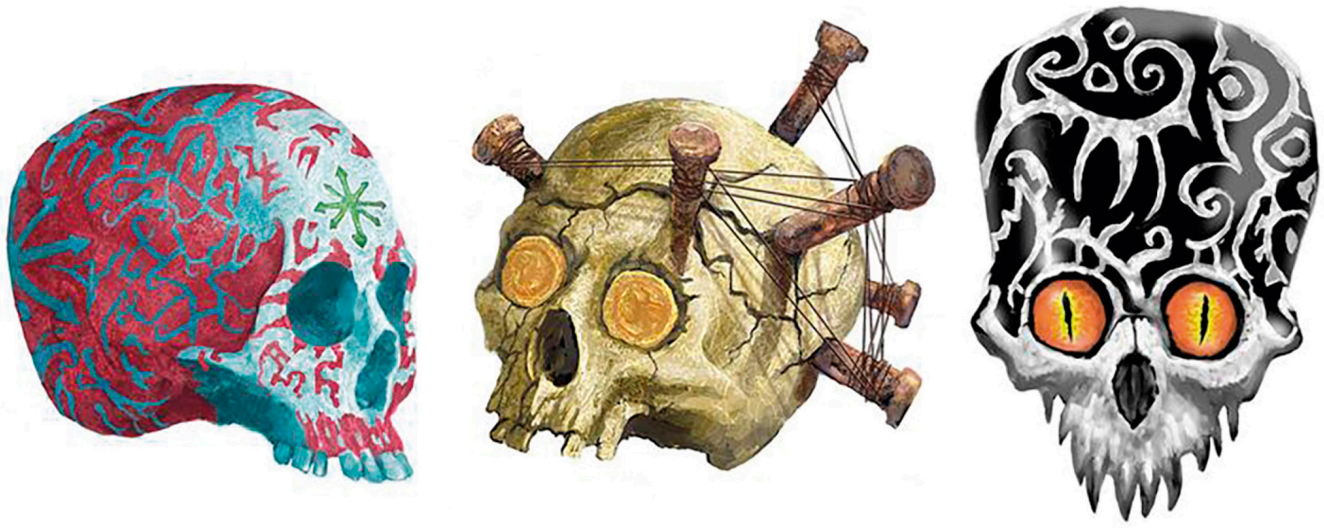
High Temple of Sigmar

Great horn of Chaos

Chaos Chosen armour design

A Tzeentchian relief

Twisted tree



Skull trophies

"Where there is resistance, Tchar'zanek will transform it to subservience. Where there is faith in the false pantheon of the Empire, he will bring obedience to the Raven God. And so long as but one of our enemies lives, our great Warlord shall seek him out and visit the change of death upon him."

– THE COMING OF TCHAR'ZANEK

The tabletop game *Mordheim: City of the Damned* was taken from initial prototype mock ups and beta rules in the pages of *White Dwarf* and developed into a full boxed game, released at the turn of the millennium. In-house writing talent and lore expertise merged with some iconic and atmospheric artwork to give *Mordheim: City of the Damned* its distinctive grim outlook and oppressive feel – a style that resonated so well in the game, and became a truly memorable part of it. This was the ultimate grimdark styling before the label really ascended into popular culture.

The video game wisely followed the source material and has been lauded in reviews and articles for the dark atmosphere that resonates with the game. The team at Rogue Factor did a great job bringing across the look and feel, and the sheer character of the city where gangs fight to recover the fragments of the sought-after wyrdstone.

The gameplay is turn-based. It's a squad-level simulation, but there are no bolters or lasguns here. Players instead use more rudimentary ranged weapons, or simply must get close enough to enemies to stab them using wicked-looking daggers, or let their larger gang members, ogres and other monstrous slabs, rip the foes asunder – limb from limb.

There were four broad factions available for players to choose from: Skaven, who, of course, coveted the wyrdstone above all others; the Cult of the Possessed, which collected the wyrdstone in service to darker powers; the mysterious Sisters of Sigmar; and mercenaries of the Empire who could be further defined depending on the state they had come from.

While the game was pretty and oozed atmosphere to successfully recreate Mordheim, many players struggled with the difficulty curve, but then again, who said scrabbling about in the ruins of the cursed city looking for magic stones, all while fighting off bloodthirsty rivals, should be easy?

Fighting Skaven for the wyrdstone on the streets of the damned city

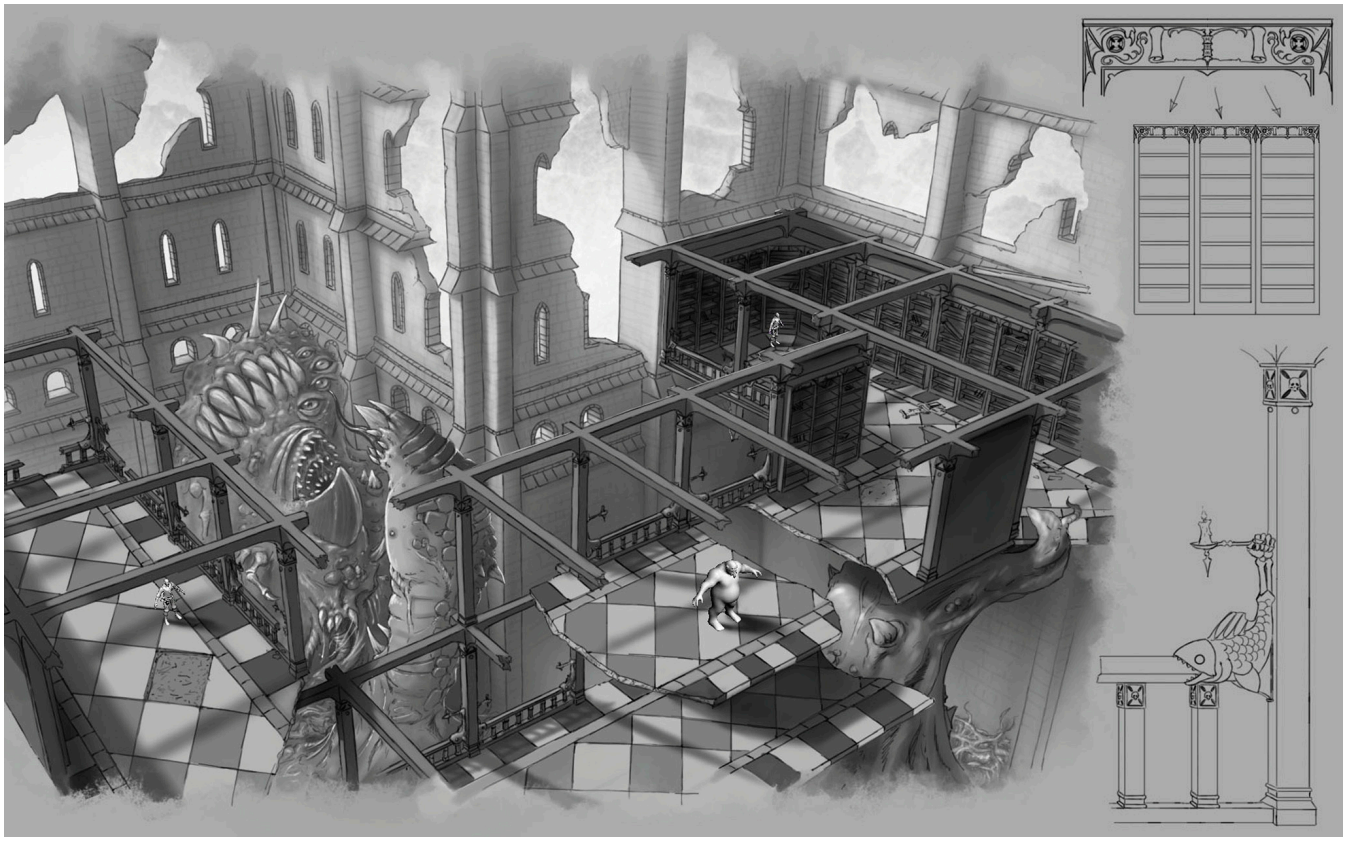
CITY VIEWS

The ruined city of Mordheim is as much a character in this game as the warriors fighting across its streets. It's a labyrinthine metropolis that has come to vivid life since a comet plunged into its heart. Post-comet, the city has changed – the denizens avoid the area known as "The Pit", the crater where the comet landed, for something lingers there. Upon the Rock, a grim fortress on an island in the River Stir, the Sisters of Sigmar are up to something rumoured to be against their tenets. The city bestrides the river itself, with three crossings within the city walls – the largest is the Middle Bridge, shown in the image below. Then there is Von Endon's amphitheatre, where midnight showings of strange and alluring performances are said to be held.

Sketch of the Middle Bridge, with Chaos-corrupted turret detail

Raven barracks illustration, with gargoyle details

Market Square fountainhead



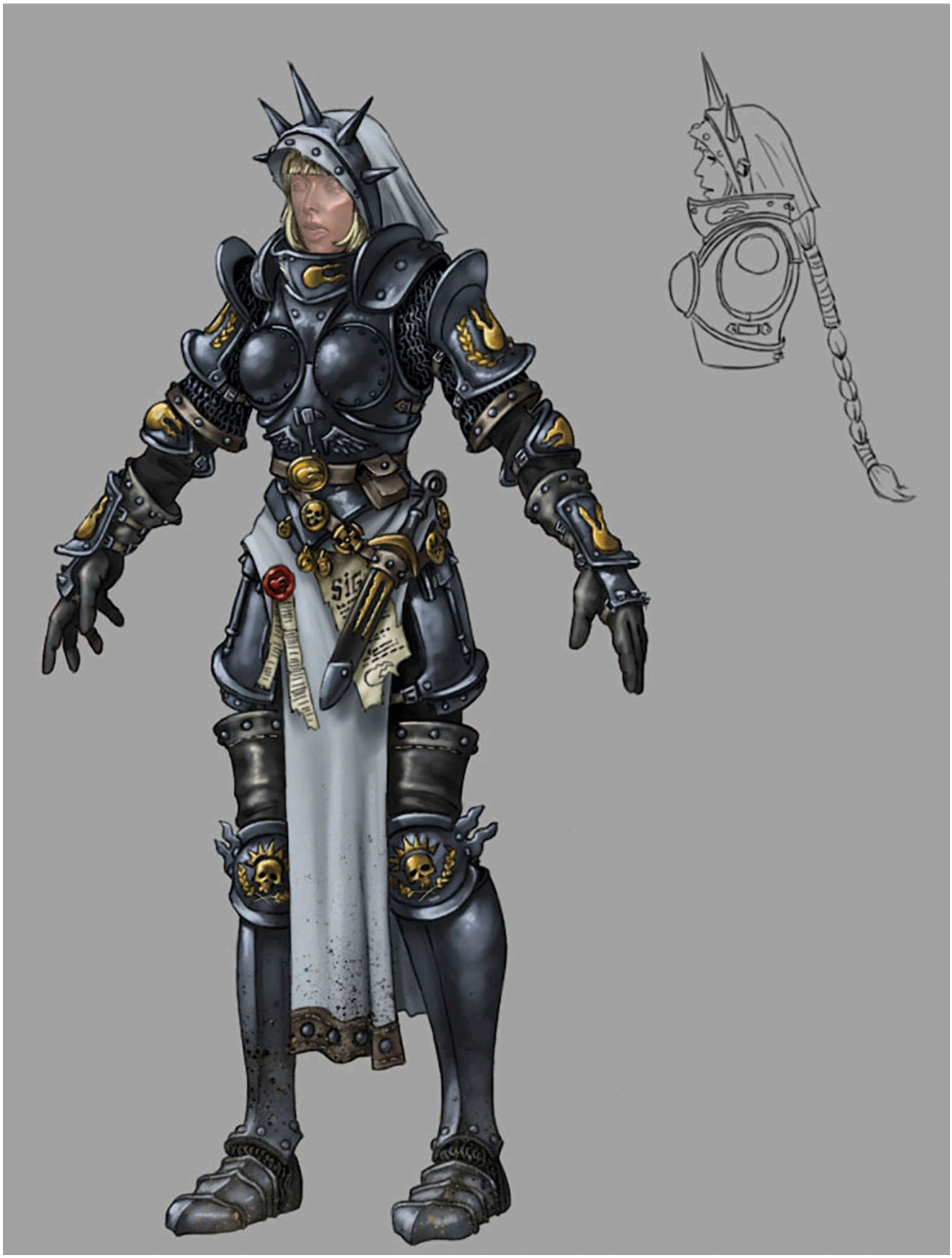
Sketch of Mordheim's Great Library, showing the ornate detail on the shelves and bannisters

SIGMAR

Possessed Temple of Sigmar statue

Chaos-corrupted weapons holder with Griffonbrand sword

Sketch of Quayside Lighthouse



Bertha Bestraufrung in armour

Male vampire in heavy armour

Alluress design

Female vampire in heavy armour

A posed Skaven with injury details

A selection of weapons used in *Mordheim: City of the Damned*

Posed corrupted Chaos Ogre

Possessed illustration

"Listen to me, boy. There are many in Mordheim who you must face. Men from the lands of Middenheim to as far as Marienburg have staked their claim upon this forsaken city. Then there are the rat-men, the walking dead, and those crazed Witch Hunters..."

– LUTHOR WOLFENBAUM, THE SO-CALLED CRIMSON BLADE OF REIKLAND

As the *Warhammer Fantasy* world reached its zenith, the End Times finally approached. Archaon's plan to doom the world began to take hold. Yet, while this was a narrative focused on big events such as the invasion of the Empire and the scourging of Ulthuan, there were plenty of smaller stories happening in this dark era, too.

Loosely based on *The Edge of Night* role-playing supplement from the third edition of *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *Warhammer: The End Times – Vermintide* is set in the Imperial city of Ubersreik. This is a settlement run by a corrupt nobility, while underneath the streets, the insidious rat-men, the Skaven, lurk. Now that the End Times are here, the Skaven no longer hide in the sewers but have erupted into the city to take full control.

This led to the making of this first-person, cooperative hack-and-slasher. Designed and developed by the talented team at Fatshark, this game immediately caught the imagination of both *Warhammer* gamers and fans of the zombie-slayer genre.

What really seemed to strike a chord with players were the heroes – those who would venture into the corrupted city to vanquish the Skaven. These are characters I know well, as I had a hand in creating them. So, for those not familiar, let me introduce the puritanical Victor Saltzpyre the Witch Hunter; the loyal soldier Markus Kruber; Kerillian, a Wood Elf Waywatcher; Dwarf Ranger Bardin Goreksson; and my favourite, the renegade Bright Wizard, Sienna Fuegonasus.

Each hero brings a distinctive personality and playstyle to proceedings, whether that's the Witch Hunter's love of pistols and extreme views on magic, Kruber's up-close attacks and pragmatism, or Sienna's fiery-bright magic and disdain for the others. These characters would later become known as the "Ubersreik Five" and together have slain hundreds of thousands – perhaps even millions – of Skaven over the years.

It wasn't just the heroes that players enjoyed; the environment of the city was typically grim and dark, guttering lantern light playing against the walls, and in later levels, the distinctive green shine of Warpstone, the magical emerald cheese the Skaven obsess over.

The game was a massive hit, and the characters broke beyond mere class categories for *Warhammer: The End Times – Vermintide* players; they became very "meme"-able. I have occasionally found messages in my X direct messages (DMs), asking what the romantic status of Kerillian is, and even asking for permission to "ship" Sienna and Victor. That is, thankfully, not my call to make!

The warriors of Ubersreik face the Vermintide

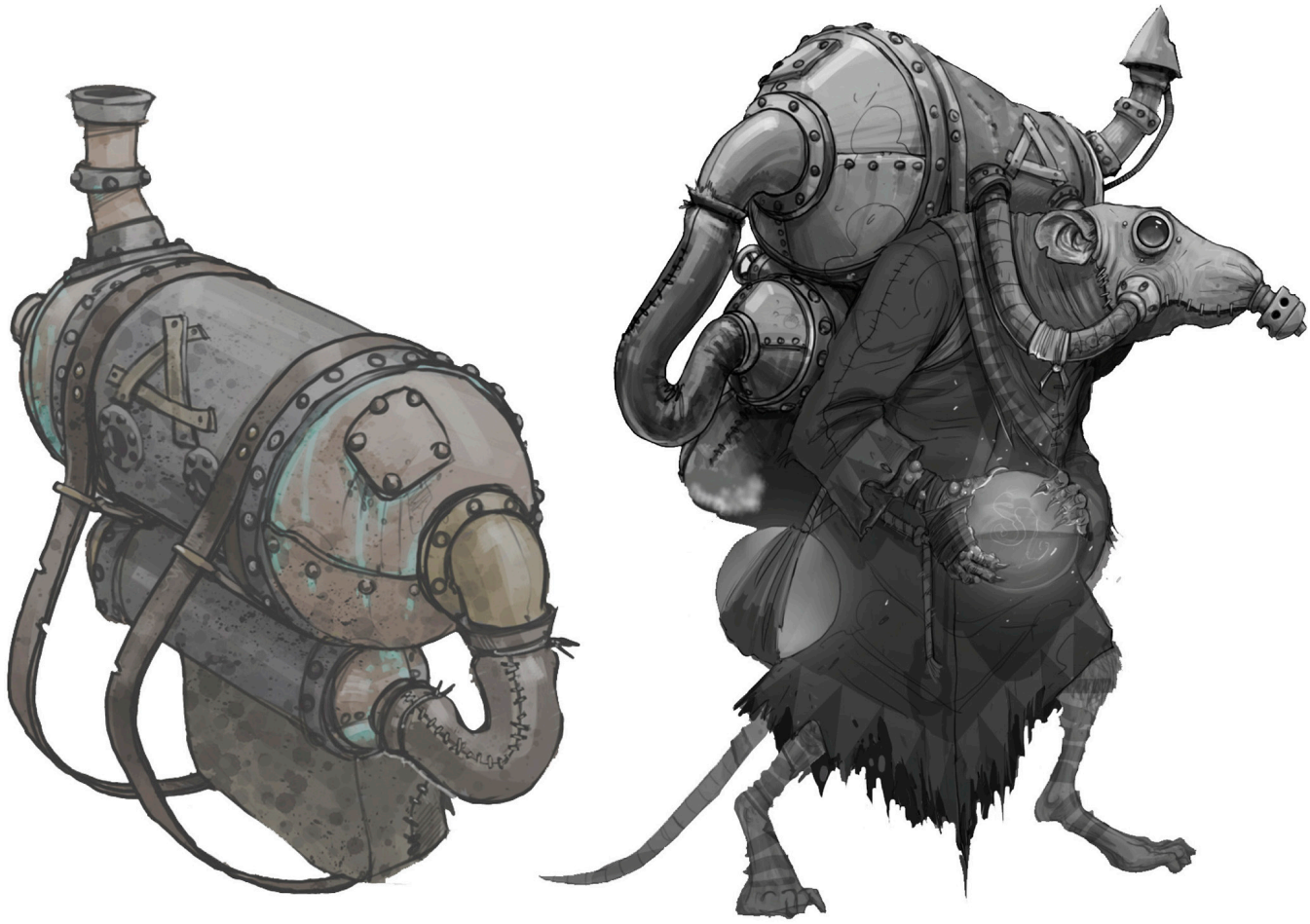
THE FIVE

The soul of *Warhammer: The End Times – Vermintide* revolved around the five playable characters. Their variety and make-up, and their interactions with each other, brought the game alive. The characters were all designed to subvert their usual class tropes or even exaggerate the traditional relationship boundaries.

Thus you have Bardin, who, far from living underground, is a Dwarf Ranger who likes to stroll and is obsessed with finding the lost stronghold of Karak Zorn; you have an intolerant Witch Hunter looking for any excuse to execute the Wizard; and the aged Bright Wizard herself, who is wise as well as wrathful.

Illustration of Bardin Goreksson

Illustration of Sienna Fuegonasus



Skaven poisoned-wind globadier

The waterfront of Ubersreik

Franz Lohner, innkeeper of the Red Moon Inn

Details of building signs

"Rested? Healed? Good, because I have another job for you. And it won't keep."

– FRANZ LOHNER OF THE RED MOON INN, POSSIBLE SPY AND MEMBER OF THE EMPEROR'S EYES

After the success of *Warhammer: The End Times – Vermintide*, it was only a matter of time before we visited the cursed city of Ubersreik once again. Events had overtaken the "Ubersreik Five", the protagonists of the first game, a first-person hack-and-slasher. We start the game finding they have been captured by Clan Festus, the Skaven clan of the villainous Grey Seer Rasknitt. But now his devious eyes have fallen on the city of Helmgart and an unholy alliance with the Nurgle-aligned Rotblood Chaos horde.

This pact is dependent on whether the Skaven can get their latest contraption, the Skittergate, working, allowing Clan Festus to transport their warriors and those of the Rotblood. This is where our heroes come in. If – or more accurately, when – they can escape, they must focus on destroying the Skittergate and confronting both the Children of Chaos and forces of the Plague God.

As well as the continuation of the story, the sequel brought some new features. Your heroes were now far more customisable, with differing weapon options, but also, they could change their careers, no doubt inspired by the revered tabletop *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* system. While this gave the characters a degree of flexibility, allowing players to really tailor the heroes to a preferred playstyle, you could argue it also made the characters more akin to avatars rather than living and breathing beings that fully existed in the *Warhammer* world. However, the pros seem to have outweighed the cons, as this has proven popular with players. You just must squint a bit and suspend your disbelief as Markus Gruber turns from an Empire soldier to Bretonnian Knight!

An expanded loot system also added to the game's addictive nature. The game's levels were even more richly dressed and sprawling than its predecessor, giving us some of the best-looking glances of an Old-World city committed to screens. Thus, this is a game that begs to be replayed, to fight and slay the varied enemies and try out all the different careers on offer. To further aid replayability, the game's dynamic enemy director was improved, meaning that no matter how many times you play a level, the Skaven Vermintide and their filthy allies will always attack from different angles, in contrasting waves, and at differing times to keep players on their toes.

Bödvarr Ribspreader, Chaos Lord of the Rotblood

ENEMY UPGRADED

The Vermintide of the game's title is the name for the fur-matted and mange-ridden horde that is the mass ranks of the Skaven. For the sequel, though, the player would be fighting not just the rat-men, but an unholy alliance of Skaven and a tribe known as the Rotblood, followers of the Chaos God Nurgle.

The Rotblood are a tribe of Norscan northlanders fully committed to furthering the spread of the Plague God. In the game you encounter various warrior types, from lowly cultists and fanatics, to raiders, Chaos Warriors with sturdy "bulwarks", Chaos Sorcerers known as Lifeleeches, and Bile Trolls.

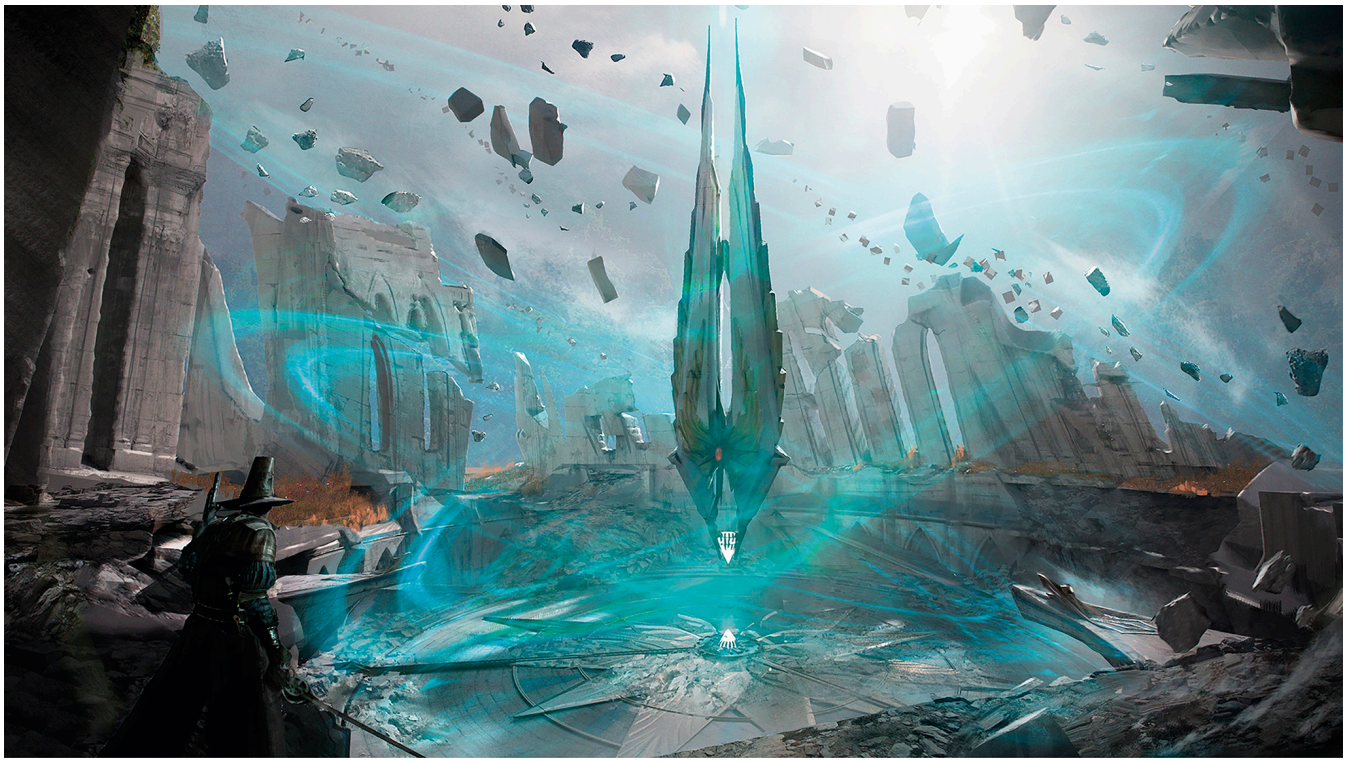
Rotblood Fanatic

Chaos Warrior of Nurgle

Minotaur

CAREER GUIDANCE

The careers system is one of the back-of-box features in *Warhammer: Vermintide II*, giving players access to differing skill bundles and a deepening sense of progression that wasn't necessarily there in the first game. A shift in career can give the characters more senior roles within their general trope, but it can also shift boundaries into troop types from different races or nations. For example, Kerillian starts as a Waystalker, but can become a Handmaiden at Level 7 and even a Dark Elf Shade at Level 12. Looking at everyone's favourite fire mage, Sienna Fuegonasus starts as a Battle Wizard, before becoming a Pyromancer at Level 7 and then an Unchained at Level 12, and through the DLC she can even join the ranks of the Undead as a Necromancer!



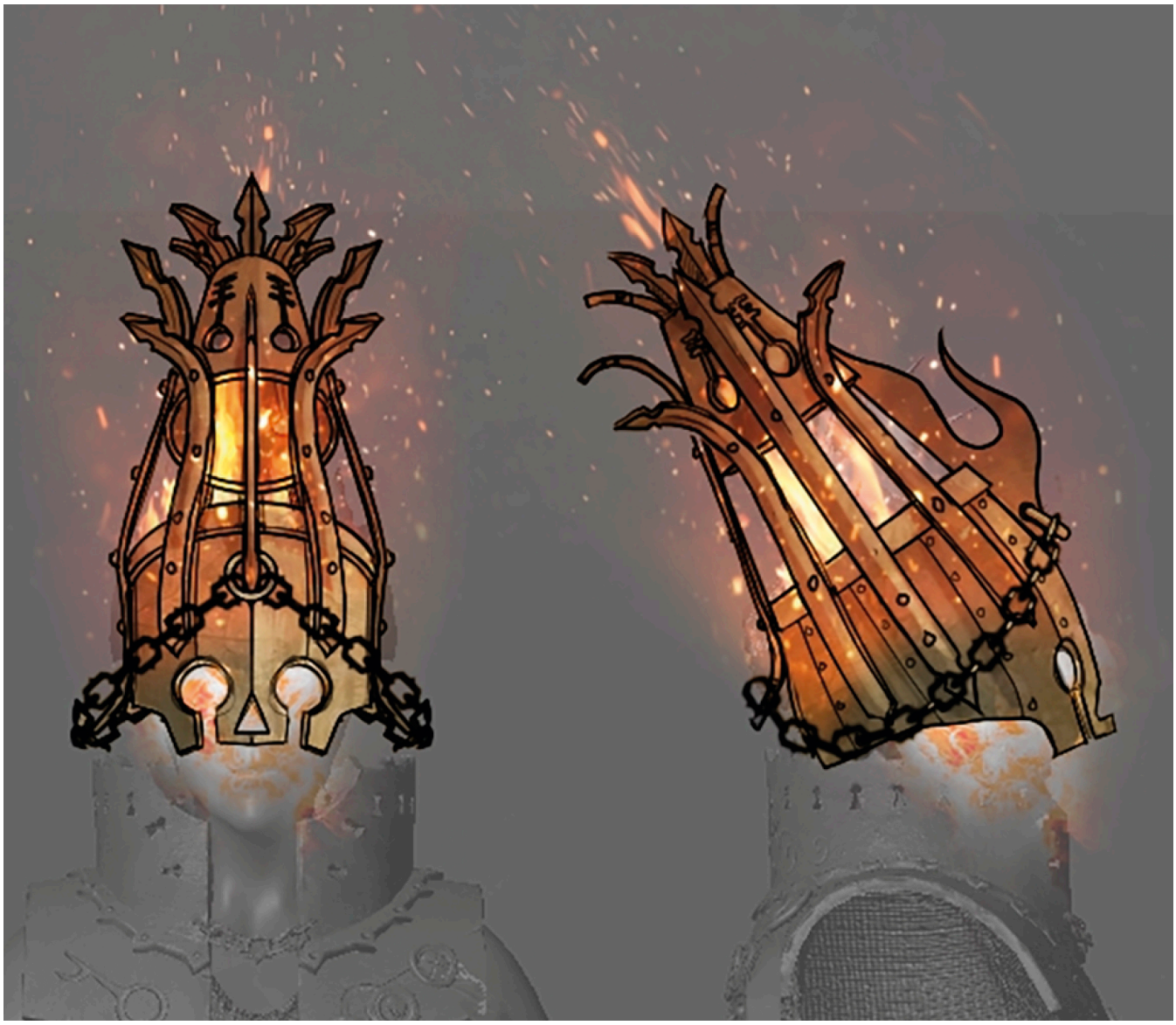
The lost temple of Athel Yenlui

Corrupted flora

Kerillian headgear concepts

Sienna Unchained career outfit

Kerillian Waywatcher career mask



Sienna Pyromancer career headgear

Kerillian's Handmaiden career skin

"The Rotbloods' patron is vile, but he is not the worst of the four brothers."

– KERILLIAN OF ATHEL LOREN

WARHAMMER® CHAOSBANE™

The End Times brought a close to the *Warhammer Fantasy* setting, yet in the late 2010s it also had an undeniable renaissance in the computer game space. The *Total War: Warhammer* series included some of the best-selling PC games (according to the Steam charts), *Vermintide I* and *II* were certified hits, and then *Warhammer: Chaosbane* released.

The game was an action RPG; it was fast, action-packed, and brutal with plenty of potential character builds to try out. Players can choose from six classes: a Witch Hunter, a soldier, a High Elf mage, a Wood Elf Waywatcher, a Dwarf engineer, and a trollslayer – the cover star of the game.

Perhaps more than any other *Warhammer* game, *Warhammer: Chaosbane* focuses on and explores the diabolical powers that the Empire must face. The story is set back a few hundred years before the reign of Karl Franz, during the aftermath of the Great War Against Chaos, when Magnus the Pious slew the Chaos Gods' champion Asavar Kul. The player's chosen character is Magnus' new champion, yet the would-be Emperor is cursed by a Chaos Sorceress on the eve of the meeting. The head Witch Hunter accuses the player, but the Archmage Teclis intervenes and sets our hero on a quest that will see them slaughter their way through the servants and daemons of all four of the Chaos Gods.

The environments are really impressive in this game, with each area focusing on the themes of the four great powers: from the sewers of Nuln wherein lies the fetid expanse of Nurgle, to a bloody fortress in Praag, a temple in which luxuriate the daemons of Slaanesh, and then into the Realm of Chaos itself to seek out the Chaos Sorceress held up in a labyrinthine fastness.

Two DLC packs followed: one based in the deserts of Nehekhara, where the hero would fight the skeletal legions of the Tomb Kings, and the final pack, which returns the player to Nuln, amid the forges of the gunnery school and plots involving the agents of Grandfather Nurgle.

Despite releasing a few years ago, the player counts for *Warhammer: Chaosbane* are still relatively high, showing there is always an appetite for slaying Chaos thralls and masters alike.

Bloodletter prepares to rend foes

T-POSING

Here and throughout the pages of this book, you have probably noticed many of the characters' images feature them standing straight with their arms outstretched to their sides. This is known as a T-pose and is often used in CGI movie productions and video games development. A T-pose is the default posture of a character, and in this state it's easier to rig the model – which is effectively adding in an animation skeleton and nodal joints for articulation and animation. This is why you'll see creatures in a similar pose, but they will also have other appendages such as tails and wings outstretched and straight, ready to be rigged.

Concept art of Professor Durer, Amethyst Order non-playable character (NPC)

T-pose of Axarath the Daemon Prince

T-pose of Collector's Guild NPC and Nuln soldier

Render of a Chaos Warrior

Side profile of a Minotaur

ENTOMBED ROYALS

Warhammer: Chaosbane focuses on the Ruinous Powers, and the Tomb Kings of Khemri, the nobility of the dead nation of Nehekhara, make worthy adversaries. Rather than fighting daemons, your foes are the Skeleton infantry, cavalry, and moving statuary, like the Necrosphinx.

A High Elf Mage casts a spell

Tomb Guard renders

Necrosphinx render

The Tomb Kings

For decades, *Warhammer* had been a twin-setting. The younger sibling *Warhammer 40,000,* set in the grim, dark far future, has always drawn video game publishers to it, compared to the original *Warhammer*, the game of fantasy battles, which had fewer games to choose from.

During this time, a British company was making waves throughout the industry with its series of historic strategy battle games. *Shogun: Total War* released in 2000 and was designed by the talented team at Creative Assembly, based in the small town of Horsham, south of London. Prior to *Shogun*'s release, the developer had primarily worked on porting sports games from one platform to another, but the first *Total War* game was such a critical and commercial success that it forever changed the direction of the company. *Total War* games based on different historical periods soon followed throughout the noughties, such as *Rome*, *Medieval*, and *Empire*. All the games featured a unique formula of real-time battles, with mass formations fighting over historically accurate battlefields, and a turn-based campaign played over a larger-scale map, where invasions were enacted and cities besieged to give the battles a context and consequence.

A fantasy version of *Total War*, and specifically a *Warhammer* version, had been mooted many times. In fact, Games Workshop and Creative Assembly had been talking on and off for a decade, but it was only in the summer of 2012 that things started to coalesce and a deal was finally done. Even then, with the End Times in development – *Warhammer Fantasy*'s swansong – there was a chance the project could have been scuppered, but the folks at Creative Assembly were happy to continue. After all, they had been creating games set in the past for years. With *Fantasy Battle* now set firmly in the past, this would be another historical project.

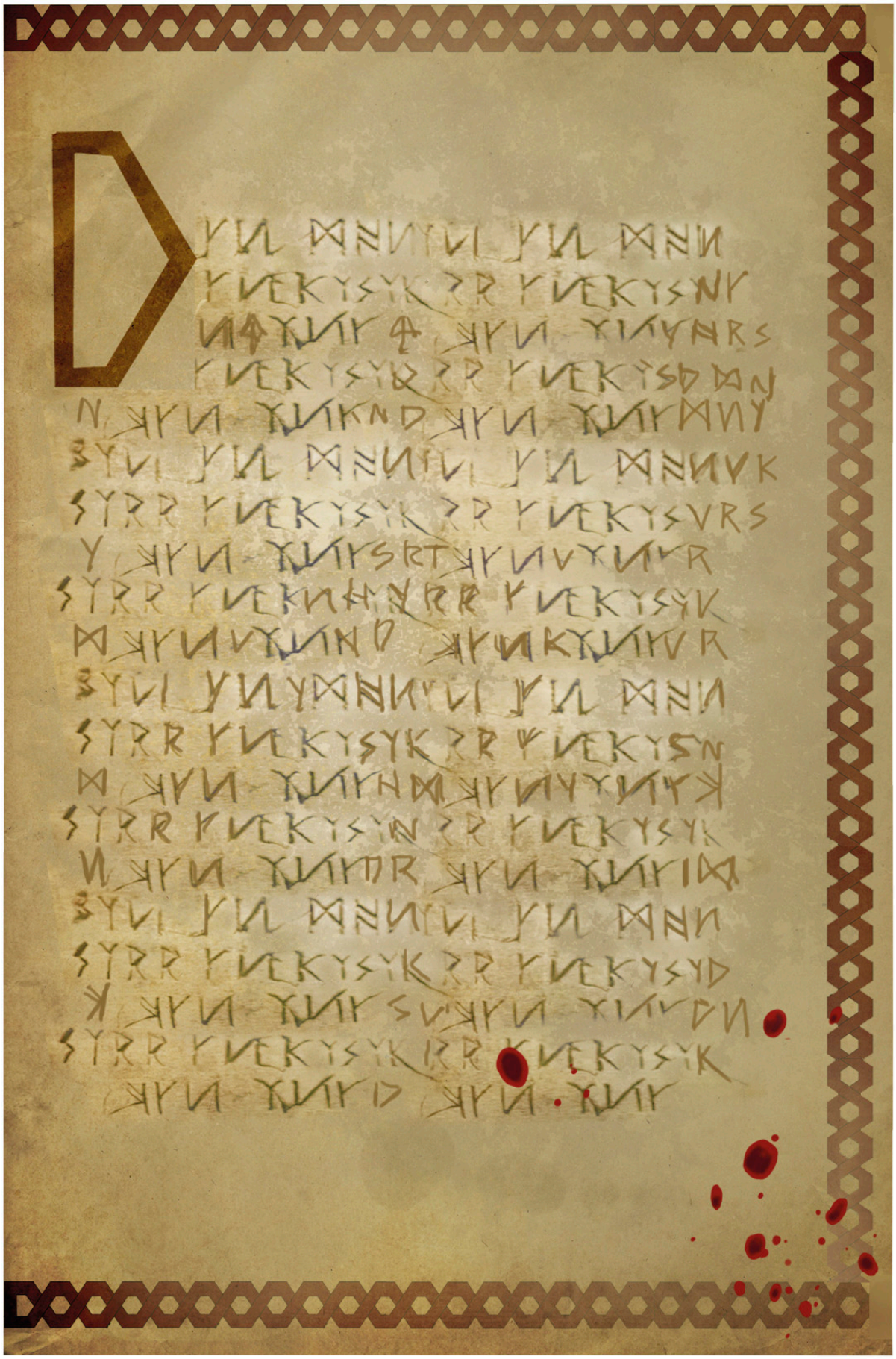
Of course, *Warhammer* was not just a different era of history; the setting would push *Total War*'s Warscape engine to places it had never been, nor was originally designed for. Gigantic monsters, flying entities, and devastating spells were all introduced. The game's AI opponents would also have to learn and defend against these new features. Even tech that had been in the game for iterations had to be ret-conned where required. For instance, the code that made marching Humans look more natural and de-synced from each other had to be stripped out for the Undead legions where skeletons marching as one was the desired effect.

Total War: Warhammer launched in 2016 to critical acclaim and record sales. The Empire of Man, the Dwarfs, Orcs, goblins, and the Vampire Counts were the starting factions – with Bretonnians as non-playable foes – but, as we shall see, this was just the start for a game system that continues to thrive today.

Karl Franz mounted on his mighty griffon, Deathclaw

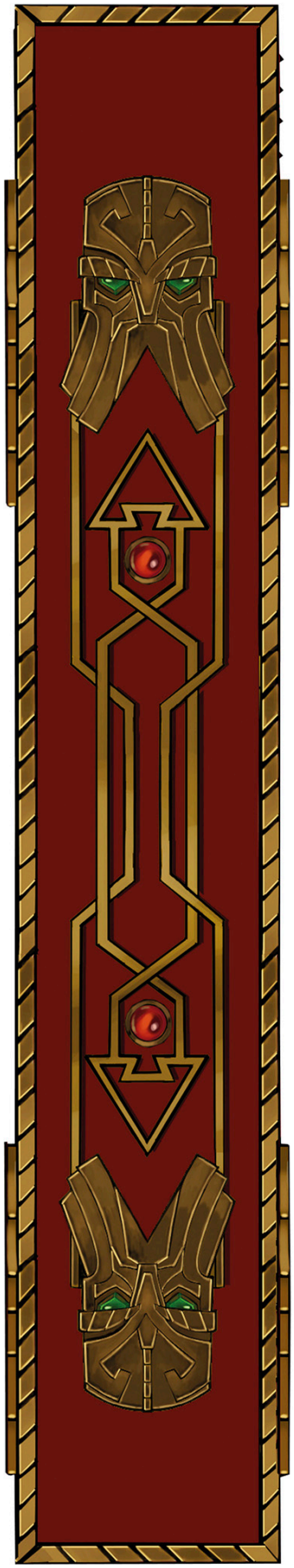
BOOK OF GRUDGES

Each of the four launch races in the first *Total War: Warhammer* would get several unique campaign and battle mechanics to reflect that faction's character. Over time, these mechanics would get more thematic and complex, but the first incarnations released with the game walked so later iterations could run. The Dwarfs began with the *Dammaz Kron*, the Great Book of Grudges, in possession of the High King. As the player's campaign continues, the Dwarfs would inevitably collect grudges that the player must remedy to receive bonuses and to allay their fellow Dwarfs, and strike the grudges from the book once vengeance had been achieved.



Pages

Cover



Spine of the Book of Grudges

An illustration of a battle between Chaos and Empire warriors

Wulfrik concept art

War Mammoth concept art

Chaos Lord and Vampire Lord concept drawings

Norscan battleship

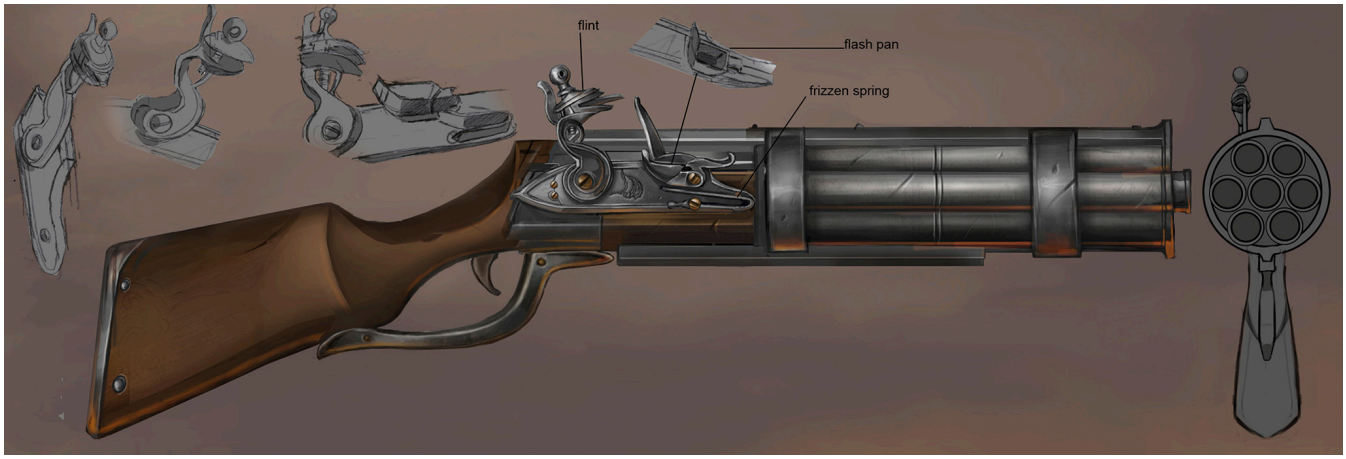
SHIPS OF THE LINE

Total War's campaign map isn't just set on dry land. Seas and estuaries separate large parts of the Old World. When an army moves over bodies of water, it transfers to a fleet, which is denoted by a selection of vessels common to that faction. These designs were inspired by *Man O'War*, a *Warhammer* naval game released back in the early 1990s.

A collection of campaign ship designs

Balthasar concept art

Karl Franz concept art



Annotated design of an Empire repeater handgun

“Summon the Elector Counts!”

– EMPEROR KARL FRANZ

The gap between *Total War* games of the same era tends to be generational. The time between *Total War: Rome* and *Total War: Rome II* was over nine years, for example. However, the *Total War: Warhammer* series had a different goal. While each "tentpole" release would be a game in its own right, the plan from the very beginning was to create a grand map of the entire *Warhammer* fantasy world, with each game adding a new continent's worth of content. A jigsaw puzzle in three pieces, with the end of the trilogy finally completing a global map.

With demand high, this meant that *Total War: Warhammer II* was slated to release just under 18 months after the first game. While this certainly added pressure to the team – I should know; I was there! – the locomotive of development was already going full steam; we just had to make sure the train tracks were laid before the engine's wheels. The development of *Total War: Warhammer II* was fast, but it all came together with the "*Mortal Empires*" campaign and a map twice the size of the first game, with all the *Warhammer* factions to date present and ready to make war with each other.

The first game had focused around the Empire and the Old World, but this new installment went across the Great Ocean to unlock the continents of Lustria, Ulthuan, and Naggaroth. The High Elves and their hated kin, the Dark Elves, joined the fray, along with the Lizardmen and, finally, the real crowd-pleaser – the dastardly Skaven. Demand for the villainous rat-men had been there from the start, so there was no way they'd be missing from the roster in the series's next tentpole.

What was learnt from creating the first game was taken on and improved for *Total War: Warhammer II*. Probably the biggest lesson was the diversity of design between the factions. It may be hard to believe now, as this is such a major pillar of the series, but originally there was some scepticism internally about how far to take the asynchronous design between the factions. After all, *Total War* had never really needed to do it before; previous *Total War* games had been based around human factions fighting in the same era, so the differences between nations was subtle. This game bought Elves, Dwarfs, and dragons, and in the case of the Lizardmen… dinosaurs riding dinosaurs, while firing space lasers. The diversity of the different armies has always been part of the joy of *Warhammer* on the tabletop, and so the team leaned into that through the first game's subsequent DLC releases, leading up to and beyond the sequel.

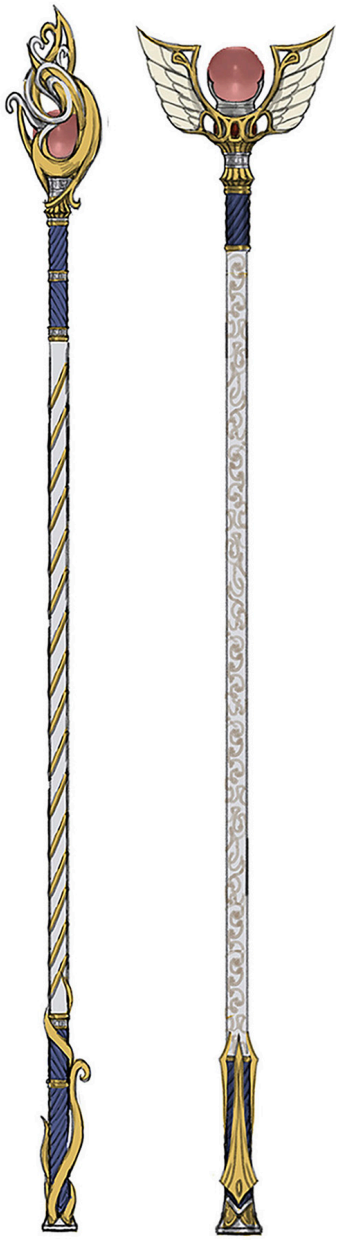
Factions vie for dominance

HATED KIN

The Elves were notoriously absent when *Total War: Warhammer* launched. They would eventually appear with the *Realm of the Wood Elves* DLC, but it wasn't until the High Elves and Dark Elves arrived in *Total War: Warhammer II* that players could take part in a feud so ancient that it was older than many dragons. A hated kinstrife so bitter that it had scarred each race for generations. The Druchii, the Dark Elves, followed their prince across the seas to the Land of Chill, Naggaroth, and now had a chance to hit back and retake their lost homeland, Ulthuan, from the weak Asur, the High Elves, once and for all. The player has the option to take the role of the near-immortal Malekith, the very prince who caused the schism, to right this ancient wrong.

Isle of the Dead concept art

High Elf artwork



High Elf mage design with staff and clothing details

Frostheart Phoenix

Witch Elf development art

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

While most of the races in the *Warhammer Fantasy* setting speak Reikspiel – which conveniently sounds like English to us – it is known that many have their own language. Skaven chitter in Queekish, the Elves speak versions of Eltharin, Dwarfs have Khazalid, while the Beastmen utter a brutal version of the dark tongue. With many of these, it was decided that clarity was needed, so the player would hear them in English, but words of their mother tongue would be "seasoned" into their lines.

The Lizardmen, as their race is so different from Humans, speak entirely in the Lizardman language of Saurian. The only problem was at that time Saurian didn't really exist, even as a basic glossary. And so began the not-so-small task of creating a Lizardmen lexicon and grammar structure, so the voice actors would be able to perform it consistently – bok!

Perhaps because I am a glutton for punishment, we decided to do this again a few years later for the Chaos Dwarfs, to give them more differentiation from their western cousins. For this, I used Khazalid as a foundation and then introduced real-world ancient influences.

Lizardmen campaign map

Lizardmen roused to war

Grymloq head detail

THE GREAT VORTEX

Total War: Warhammer II came with two campaigns for the player. The larger of the two combined maps from both *Total War* games, and the other was a campaign with a more narrative bent. This campaign was a chance for the player to participate in an epic story worthy of any Black Library novel. The Great Vortex at the heart of Ulthuan was the stage, and Skaven machinations were the catalyst. All four of the game's main factions raced to the High Elves' island to prevent the Vortex from being subsumed by the Grey Seers to summon the Skaven God, the Great Horned Rat, into the material world. A series of movies were used to tell this tale, making it a fan favourite.

Skaven Assassin Hero with weapons

will need to be more open

Lord Mazdamundi concept and details

From the in-game movies, the Skaven scribe, Sneek Scratchett, experiments in his laboratory

While the second game in the series was hot on the heels of its predecessor, *Total War: Warhammer III* was given more time to bake in the oven. The *Total War* team was preparing to release the next major historical game, and this gave the *Warhammer* team more time to plan and develop the third tentpole of the trilogy.

The game's roster was the first thing that needed ironing out. Ogres and daemons were the last two published army books still on the shelf, so they were included. Also, as dark as *Warhammer* can be, data showed that a good chunk of players wanted a protagonist faction. You need some light to contrast against the dark. But who? Games Workshop had agreed to flesh out the nation of Kislev. It'd had a minor presence since the first game, but we knew that would not be enough.

Knowing it'd be a long shot, I suggested Grand Cathay, the massive nation led by the Celestial Dragon Emperor in the far east of the Old World. The trouble was, *Warhammer* had been going since 1983, and in that time approximately two pages' worth of content had been said about Cathay. Yet we asked anyway, and to our surprise, they said yes! Games Workshop then began work designing that until-now shrouded area of the *Warhammer* world.

The results of this research were fantastic. Grand Cathay was a colourful, flavourful nation of internecine dragon-siblings, all vying for the attention of their father, the aloof Dragon-Emperor. It's a place of massed infantry, many-eyed crow-men, terracotta statuary, and giant flying war lanterns.

Yet the game was more than Grand Cathay. It was finally time to focus on a keystone of the *Warhammer* setting: the Chaos Gods. Not only did the four gods get their own rosters in this game, but the player could, at last, visit the Realm of Chaos itself in a narrative campaign to rescue – or devour – Kislev's bear god, Ursun.

And there was more. *Total War: Warhammer III* introduced the concept of the Daemon Prince. While the pantheon of daemons in *Warhammer* had recognisable forms, from a Great Unclean One to a lonely Nurgling, Daemon Princes are different. They are mortals who have trodden so far down the Path of Damnation they are rewarded with daemonhood. Daemon Princes can vary wildly in appearance depending on whom they serve the gifts awarded to them by their capricious masters, as well as their underlying personal desires and qualms. This gave us a great chance to work up *Total War*'s first-ever customisable avatar system, allowing the player to depict their Daemon Prince and evolve them over the campaign.

The third and final game in the trilogy was jam-packed, but it was not the end of the series. The Chaos Dwarfs arrived a year after the game's release, and more content is planned. The series delivered on its promise it made to players at the very start with "*Immortal Empires*", creating a humongous map a decade in the making. There, millions of battles have taken place and the fate of the world is fought over and over again.

Total War: Warhammer III key art

THE REALM OF CHAOS

Total War: Warhammer III dared to go to places no other *Warhammer* game would consider: the Realm of Chaos. This extra-dimensional realm is where the Chaos Gods reside. This is a place of insanity and wonder, where the laws of nature are ignored for the whims of the Dark Gods themselves. In the game's "*Realm of Chaos*" campaign, players must take their Legendary Lord into the Realm of Chaos and face challenges in each realm, be they the temptations of Slaanesh or the dreaded arenas of Khorne, until they face a Daemon Prince. They must vanquish the Prince and steal its soul for the greater prize: Ursun, the bear-god of Kislev.

Artwork of Mammoth Skull Mountain in the Ogre Kingdoms

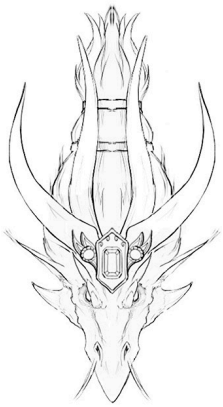
Kislev elemental bear

Nurgle campaign map

Illustration of the Ninth Library in Tzeentch

FROM TABLETOP TO GAME, BACK TO TABLETOP

Grand Cathay was one of the starting factions in *Total War: Warhammer III,* but unlike almost any nation before, it had no presence or miniature range in the source tabletop game. Games Workshop's Forge World design team agreed to bring this mysterious area of the *Warhammer* world to life for use in *Total War*, fleshing out the history and world-building and even giving a full roster and 8th Edition army book, which remains secret and unpublished to this day. However, all is not lost for miniature-lovers. With this material now in existence, Grand Cathay can muster its armies with a full range of plastic kits in the *Warhammer: The Old World* game. This is probably one of the few instances, along with Lieutenant Titus in *Space Marine*, where video game characters have preceded their *Warhammer* miniatures counterparts into the world, rather than the other way around.



Storm Dragon concept art

Jade Longma side view

Terracotta Sentinel

Concept art of Miao Ying, the Cathay Storm Dragon, in Human form

THE DARK MASTER

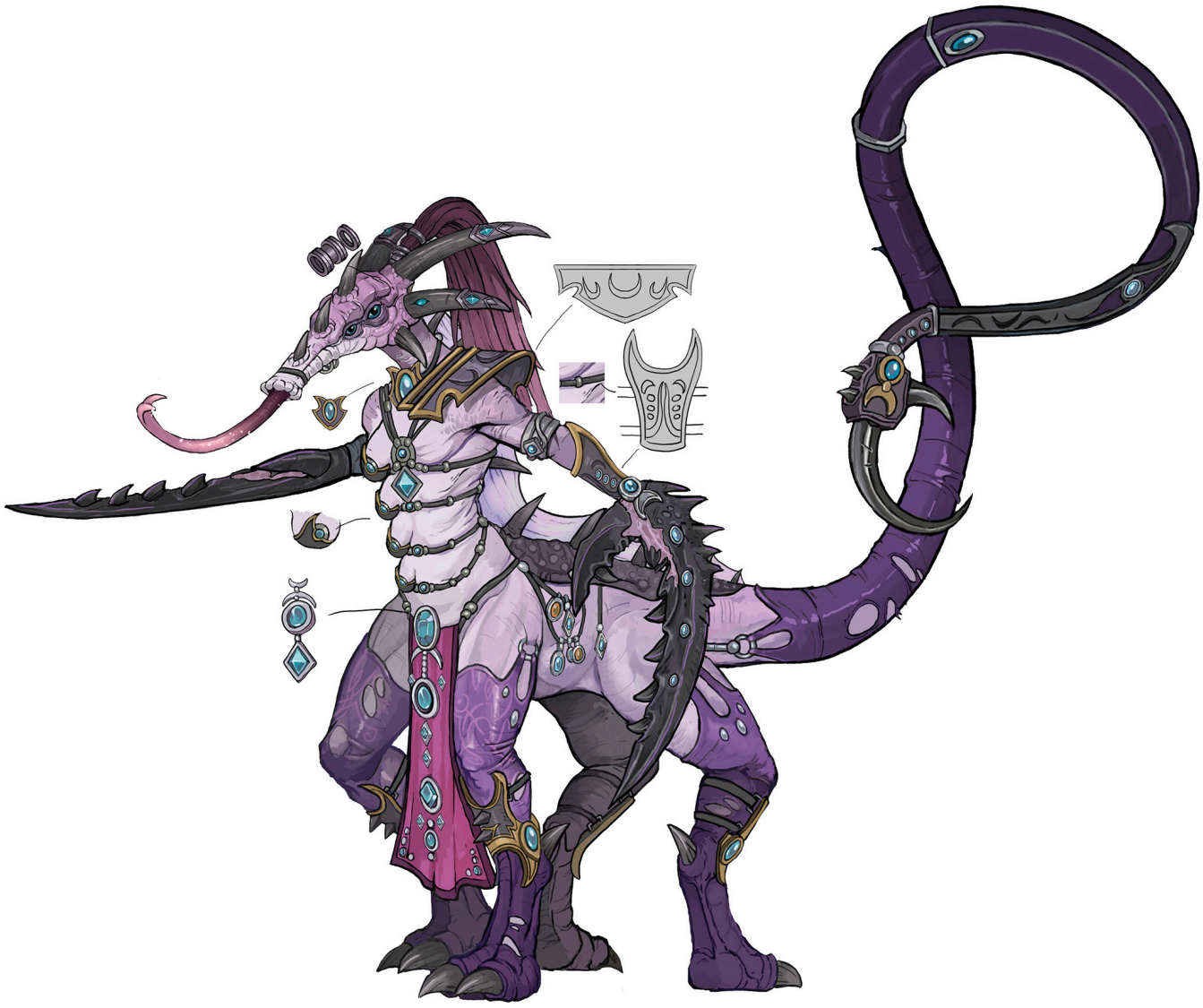
Every story needs a villain, but when the player is using such protagonists as the Bloodthirster Skarbrand, N'Kari, or even Greasus Goldtooth, how can any antagonist compare? As the old adage goes "there is always a bigger fish", and in the context of *Warhammer*, "there's always a more evil and power-hungry character." Enter the Dark Master, Be'lakor, the ultimate *Warhammer* villain, who is despised by mortals and has managed to even upset the Chaos Gods.

Be'lakor is the first Daemon Prince, the first mortal to have ascended to daemonhood. Cursed by the Chaos Gods, he seeks to break his bondage, and in the "*Realm of Chaos"* campaign, an opportunity to do just that is engineered by the Dark Master himself.

Concept art of Be'lakor

Exalted Bloodthirster concept art with head detail

Khorne siege tower



Fiend of Slaanesh

Chaos Spawn

N'Kari concept art

Khorne campaign map

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Blood Bowl key art

BLOOD BOWL

[Blood Bowl, Blood Bowl II, and Blood Bowl III]

BLOOD BOWL

The concept of *Blood Bowl* came from the genius idea that smashing together the *Warhammer Fantasy* setting with the sport of American Football would be a winning formula. As the first edition of the tabletop game began to be put together by the bright minds in game development, it was quickly realised that *Blood Bowl* had established a whole new pathway towards a future of fun...

The first *Blood Bowl* video game was an MS-DOS version released back in 1995. It was a fun simulation of the board game at the time. But things really kicked up a gear when Cyanide Studio took over stewardship of the *Blood Bowl* games, beginning a relationship that has now lasted over 20 years. The French-based studio has created three *Blood Bowl* games over the past two decades along with countless DLC, including new teams, stadiums, and support staff.

Cyanide's *Blood Bowl* games usually have a distinctive split between real-time gaming and a turn-based system that follows closely to the tabletop rules. But what the video game can do beyond its tabletop parent is animate the sheer lunacy of a *Blood Bowl* match. This is what gives these video games so much character, whether it's ball-holding goblins being flung by ogres into the end zone, daemons wearing sports jerseys, or aloof eleven catchers being bludgeoned into the field dirt by a black Orc.

Much is made of *Warhammer*'s grimdark atmosphere, but from the very beginning, it has also brought satire and comedy to its worlds. Some of this humour is subtle. Some of it is more blatant. *Blood Bowl* falls firmly into the latter category; this is slapstick parody at its finest, taking on not just the ridiculousness of the concept, but the commercialisation of sports entertainment. In the *Blood Bowl* world you have television – albeit viewed through crystal balls – sports pundits are ogres and vampires, and the largest sports drink manufacturer is run by the Skaven of Clan Pestilens. I think it's for these reasons that *Blood Bowl* remains one of my favourite settings even now.

Reikland Reaver attempts escape from Orc pursuer

GOOD SPORT

Real-life sports pitch (pun intended) humans versus, well, other humans. While that is certainly possible in *Blood Bowl*, nothing quite so mundane is the norm. No, the real spice of *Blood Bowl* is how the different species face off against each other; the teams are as varied as the kit they wear. *Blood Bowl* features everything from the super-accurate and agile Elven players, to the slow and steady Dwarf teams who will collect the ball and move at a Dwarf's pace up the pitch, to the more brutal greenskin teams that occasionally forget there even is a ball in play and are far more interested in breaking heads, to Chaos teams that deliberately ignore the ball and are desperate to spill as much blood on the pitch as possible to summon some daemon "players" onto the roster.

Dwarf head design illustration

Dwarf players enjoy a pre-match ale

Blizzard on the pitch

Star player H'thark the Unstoppable

Goblin player

Kislev player

A GAME OF TWO HALVES

Blood Bowl video games traditionally have two modes – there is a real-time version, where the teams are acting simultaneously, and your reactions are the key driver. However, perhaps surprisingly for a video game, by far the most played version is the turn-based mode, which takes the board game ruleset and effectively digitises it, replete with even the dice rolls. This makes *Blood Bowl* games far more strategic than fast-reaction sports, yet while players facing each other over the table can accept a bad or unlucky roll, there is a certain sting and even an accusation of bias when a video game rolls better than you!

Wood Elf ball

Shambling Undead ball

Brutal ball

Bloodthirster charges towards Human player

Underworld team shot

Lizardmen team shot

Block Dice

"The Reavers are in trouble, Bob. Even without Varag, the Gouged Eye are one slick outfit at the top of their game. I don't think Reikland stands a chance."

– JIM JOHNSON

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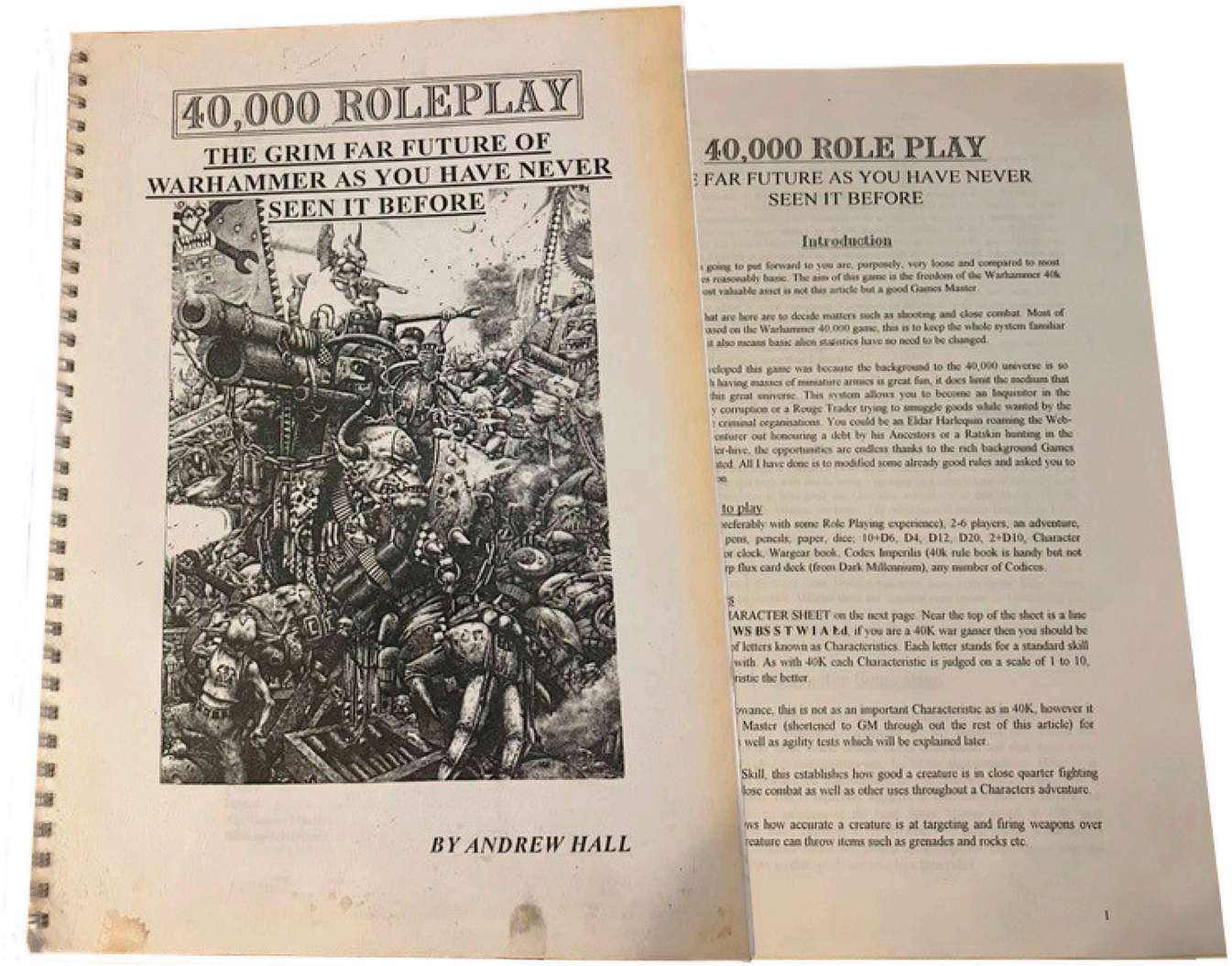
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Hall is the Principal Narrative Designer and writer for the *Total War: Warhammer* games, and has been for over 10 years. He has worked on two BAFTA-nominated titles in the series: *Total War: Warhammer II* and *III*. Andy has also contributed to many of the games featured here during his tenure as a freelance video game writer. Even before that, he has had a career intrinsically linked with *Warhammer*, working at Games Workshop for 16 years and contributing to many games such as *Blood Bowl*, *Inquisitor*, *Warhammer 40,000*, and a long stint on *White Dwarf* magazine, writing over fifty battle reports.



As a young, enthusiastic *Warhammer* fan way back in 1996, Andy submitted a manuscript (pictured above) to Games Workshop. It was his draft for a role-playing game set in the grim worlds of *Warhammer 40,000*. Over a decade later an official role-play game was indeed released – it was not, however, based on Andy's system!

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